

APRIL 2026

SOCIAL COHESION IN NEW ZEALAND



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We had the opportunity to work with three interns:

Charlotte Knights worked on understanding what social cohesion policies and actions have been taken in the UK in recent years, and lessons for New Zealand.

Isaac Baxter worked on collating historical data for comparable questions and analysis method for identifying clusters within our growing database.

Dr Taylor Marston helped us to develop a qualitative approach (and conduct some interviews) to understanding what social cohesion approaches could work in New Zealand. This solutions work is ongoing.

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Key points

Social cohesion is the foundation on which a community or nation can navigate complexity and challenges. This is the premise of our social cohesion research programme.

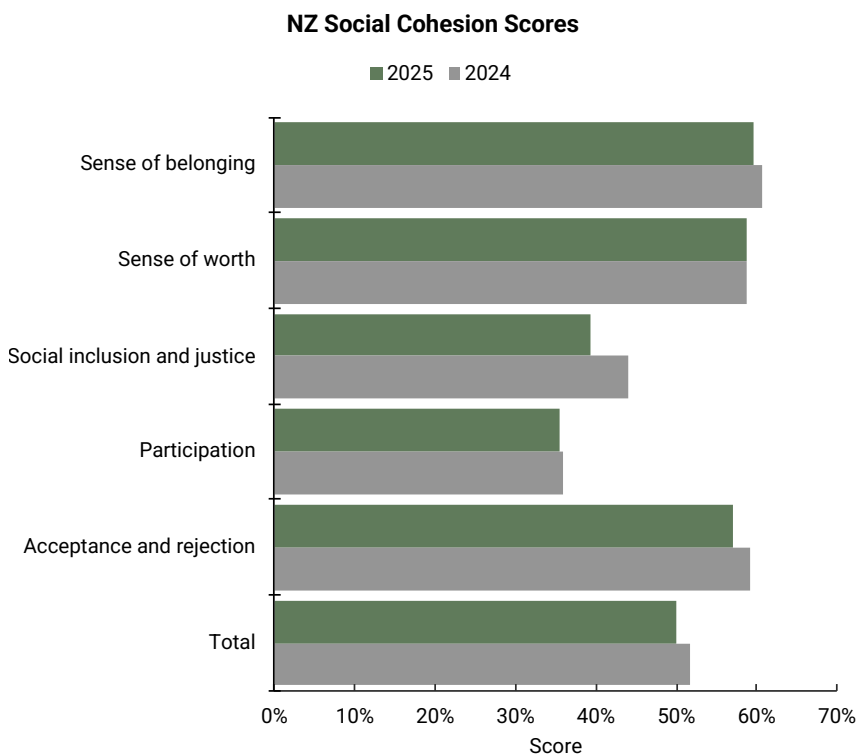
New Zealand faces multiple long-term challenges including geopolitical turbulence, climate change, ageing population, and stagnant productivity. Our ability to navigate this complexity and challenging decisions require both excellent technical policy and good social cohesion for the right solutions to endure.

We surveyed 2,882 people in late 2025, asking the same questions as last year, and included a new module on social media. It is larger than usual surveys, to ensure representative samples for ethnic breakdowns.

The results are hopeful and disappointing in equal measure.

Hopeful, because there are still strong pillars of cohesion that bind us together. Over 80% of us are taking pride in the New Zealand way of life and culture, and there is a sense of belonging in New Zealand, consistently held across the country, for local and foreign born. Our young people are more aspirational than older people (although they also experience worse social cohesion outcomes). These are strong foundations that need to be harnessed to create local community investment, which has fallen.

Figure 1: New Zealand's social cohesion is drifting lower on every dimension



Disappointing, because cohesion has slipped across all dimensions, with notable declines in belief that hard work brings a better life, a fair go for all, and trust in government and courts. There have been sharp drops in institutional legitimacy.

Attitudes towards immigrants are worsening, mirroring a similar decline in Australia recently. However, we also found that contact reduces prejudice.

The experience of social cohesion is not uniform. We found three distinct groups: 30% are connected, who experience high cohesion across all dimensions; 41% are ambivalent, who experience middling cohesion and low participation; and 28% are alienated, where they are disconnected from traditional civic and social connections, but are often engaged in protest, online and other activities.

Financial stress, political alliance, institutional distrust, and social isolation reinforce each other. They produce a population that is frustrated and disconnecting from the conventional institutions we rely on for collective decision-making.

Figure 2: Financial stress explains much of the difference in social cohesion, with compounding factors stacked on top

Cross-section	Sense of belonging	Sense of worth	Social inclusion & justice	Participation	Acceptance & rejection	Total
Financial comfort	High	High	High	High	High	High
Political allegiance	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	High
Employment	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Housing tenure	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Age	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Religiousness	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Region	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Ethnicity	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Social media use	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Number of adults in household	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Number of children in household	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Gender	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
NZ/foreign born	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium

Polarisation of views:

Low

Medium

High

But the data also points to what works. Contact with people from different backgrounds consistently predicts stronger belonging and more accepting attitudes. Even among those struggling financially, a strong sense of belonging keeps people participating in their communities. Young New Zealanders are more aspirational than any other age group, even though their lived experience of cohesion is the worst. These are foundations we can build on, if we choose to invest in them.

The rest of this report explores where the cracks are deepest, what the evidence says about closing them, and what we are learning from communities and practitioners doing this work.

NZ vs Australia

The survey for this report is modelled on Australia's Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Monitor. This allows comparability across our metrics.

There are similarities, with both countries reporting very high sense of belonging in the country. Partisan polarisation is much the same, with a little over 25% trust gap between government and opposition voters.

But Australians are happier (79% vs 56%), more connected to their neighbourhoods (82% vs 63% say neighbours would help), and far more likely to participate in social or religious groups (41% vs 27%). Even as both countries secularise, Australia retains a thicker layer of community infrastructure (clubs, congregations, and groups) where people build trust face to face. New Zealand's infrastructure has thinned out.

But New Zealand holds an advantage in institutional legitimacy. In New Zealand, 80% believe elections are fair, compared to 62% in Australia.

Australia's immigration attitudes have hardened fast, with 51% saying immigration is too high and the share agreeing immigrants make the country stronger falling 12 points in a single year. New Zealand is not immune to those pressures, but the pace is slower and the starting point less hostile (36% say too high, with only a 3 point shift).

If we want to learn from Australia, the lesson is about social infrastructure: invest in the places and organisations where people actually meet each other. And if Australia wants to learn from us, it is that democratic legitimacy is worth protecting.

Three New Zealands

We took the full two years of survey data and asked a clustering algorithm to find natural groupings in 5,513 survey responses. It consistently identifies three distinct populations:

The Connected (30%)

They feel they belong and feel valued, trust the system to be fair, and they are warm towards New Zealanders who are different from them. They score the highest of any group on belonging, on self-worth and on acceptance of others. And they aren't very likely to participate in community, religion and politics.

They are a connected but comfortable group, and they span across incomes, age and ethnicity. Their key characteristics are connected, comfortable and settled.



The Ambivalent (41%)

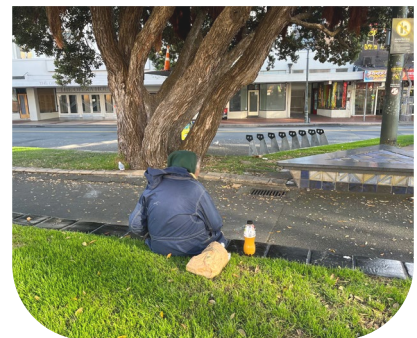
The largest group, which matters most for policy. They feel a moderate sense of belonging, have middling trust in institutions, and participation in community life is low. There is no great hostility, nor active participation. But our data suggests this group feels it the most when economic conditions worsen or political discourse becomes more divisive.

This group contains most of the country's older homeowners, retirees, and centre-right voters. They are materially comfortable, happy, but not deeply connected to the social fabric. The most settled group materially is also the most disengaged civically, but perhaps the group most easily re-engaged if we make an active effort.



The Alienated (28%)

There is a large group that is disconnected from the promise of our country. They feel alienated but show oppositional activity and participation. They participate in a range of activity from protesting to posting online, as well as report low belonging, low acceptance of other New Zealanders, and the highest sense that the system is unfair. Almost half of Māori and Pasifika are in this group. So are nearly half of Green voters and seven in ten New Zealand First voters, who disagree on most other things, but the same structural position. They are the loudest voices in our public conversation, and the ones most likely to feel the country is not for them.



These three groups experience New Zealand very differently. That means policy making and interventions cannot be one dimensional; we need to understand the differing causes and remedies that may be required. This complexity can lead to a desire for homogenisation and centralisation, but the UK experience (see box 2) shows that is unlikely to succeed.

Updated estimates using method researched and documented by Isaac Baxter.

Figure 3: Nearly 30% are alienated

Social cohesion clusters

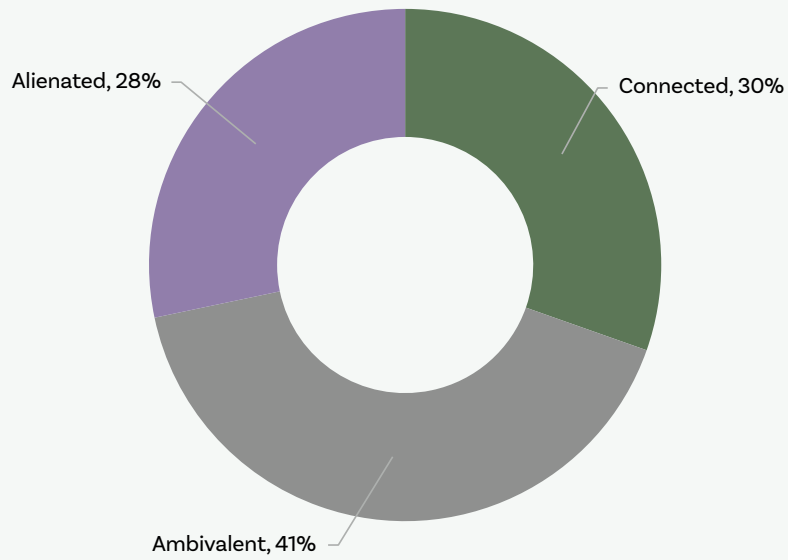


Figure 4: There are three very different experiences

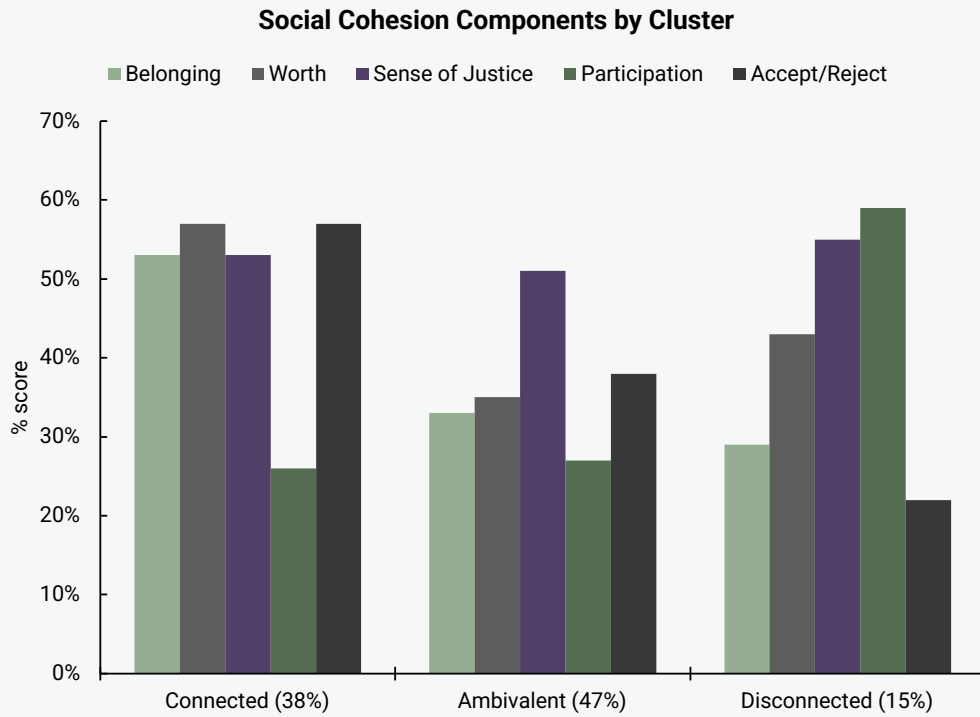
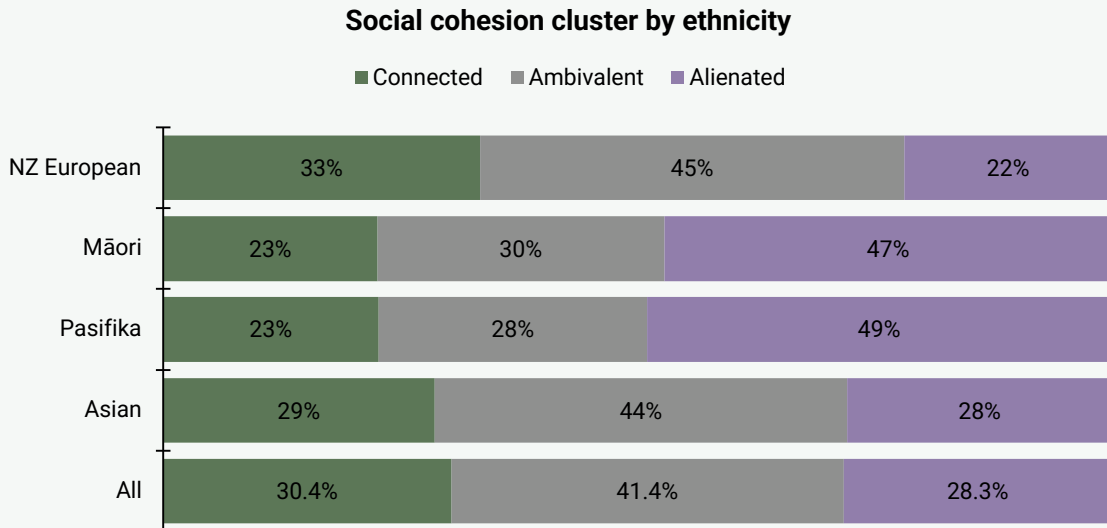


Figure 5: Ethnicity gives an additional lens



Box 1: The longer view

Our surveys conducted at the end of 2024 and end of 2025 – alongside data from the General Social Survey, the World Values Survey, the NZAVS, and the Migrant Communities Perceptions Monitor, some stretching back to 1998 – show some important trends.

We have presented a small subset of issues, where the questions across surveys are similar enough to be comparable.

Key trends include:

- a rise in isolation/loneliness since 2010, when very few people (1%) reported feeling isolated often, to over 14% in 2025
- trust in government, which peaked in 2020 (during the pandemic), has steadily trended lower since then. The latest at 39% trusting government is the lowest in our short dataset. Within this, there continues to be strong faith (80%) that democracy is a good way to govern. However, this is accompanied by an increased share of people supporting a strong leader (although it dipped in 2025 to 28%) and experts or technocrats (52%)
- there has been a gradual erosion of support for immigration across a range of indicators. Multiculturalism is still viewed positively by the majority (67%) but is at its lowest ebb in data going back to 2011. While we see tolerant attitudes from those with diverse friend groups, with over 90% reporting close friends from diverse backgrounds, there is a disconnect.

Figure 6: The rise of loneliness

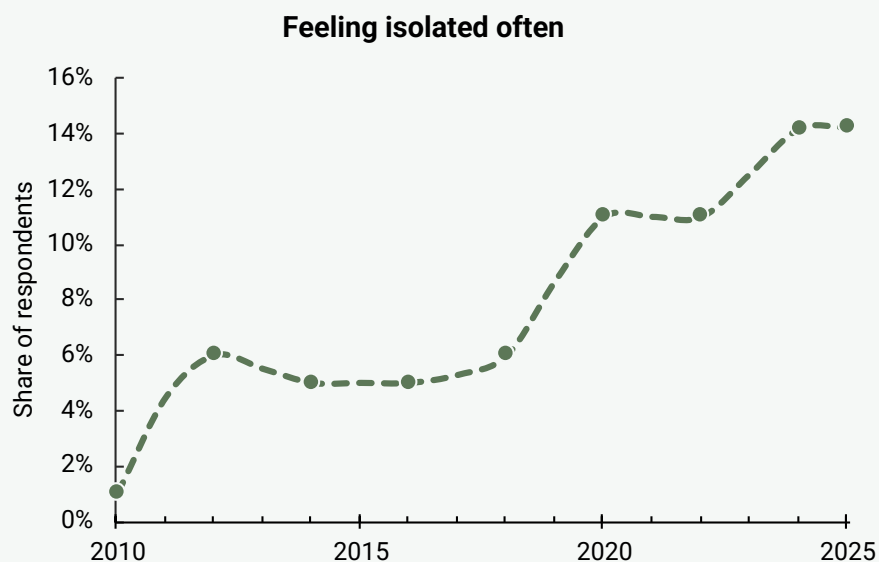


Figure 7: Diminishing trust in government

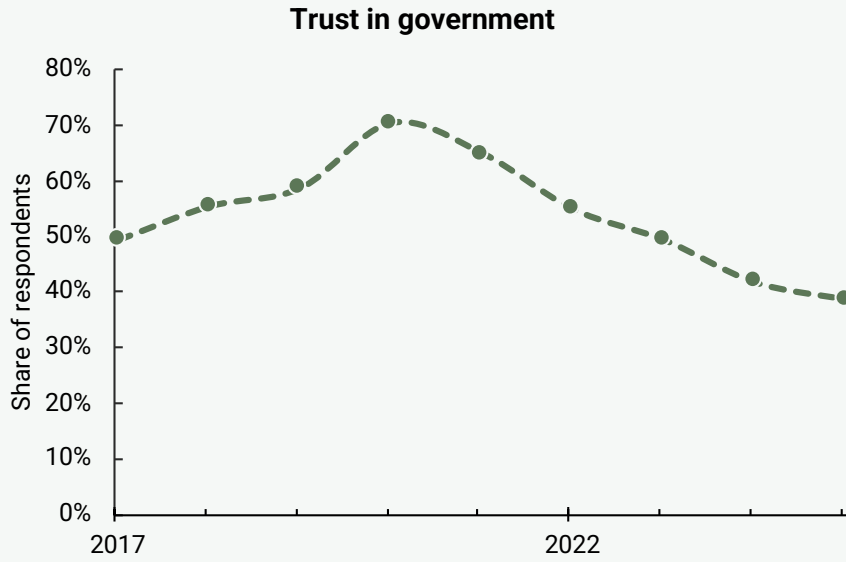


Figure 8: Trust in democracy, but want different leaders

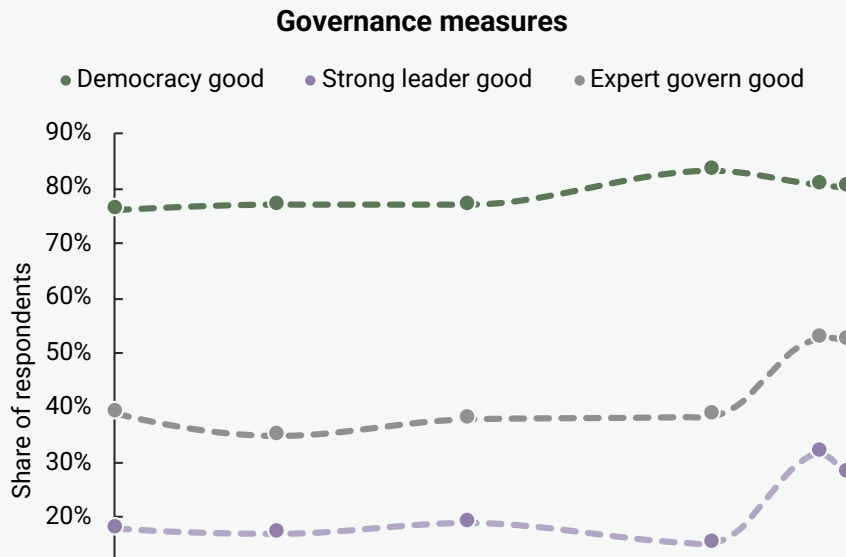
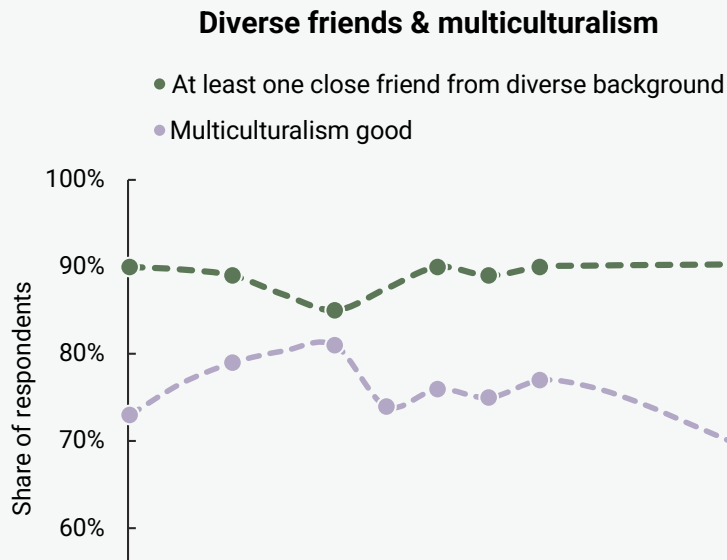


Figure 9: Attitudes towards immigration hardening, despite most having friends from diverse backgrounds





Insights



Insight 1: Young Kiwis are hopeful

The questions in our survey span both aspirations and experiences. The data can be analysed in many ways, but this particular framing showed a stark divergence that came up repeatedly in statistical analyses.

The aspiration index in 2024 was 71.5%, much higher than experience at 68%. That is, we were more hopeful than what we experienced.

In 2025, aspiration fell to 69.5% while experience fell slightly to 67.3%.

There is a generational aspect.

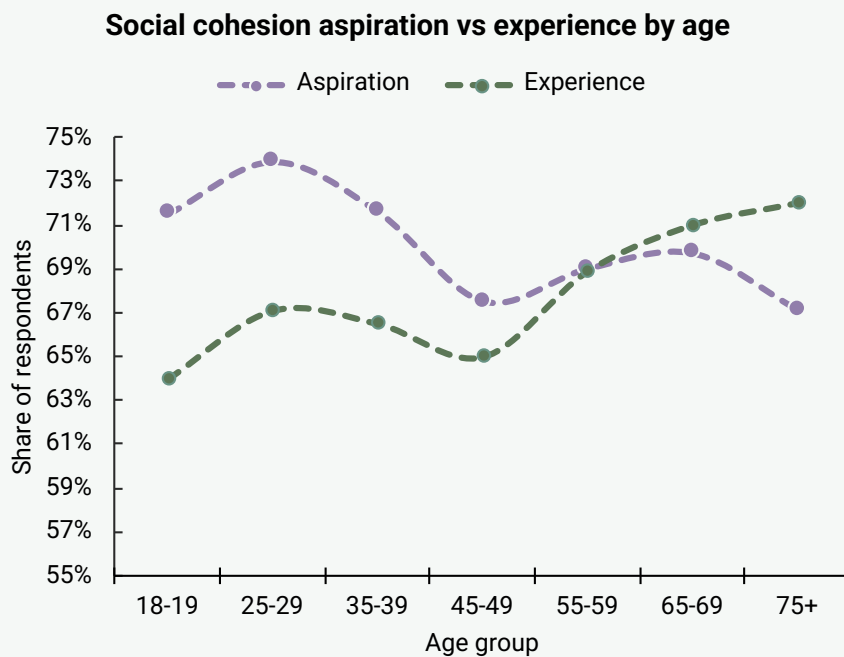
Young people are the most aspirational, even though their experiences are the lowest. The low experience is often related to life-stage effects, such as beginning of career-related incomes and work opportunities, but also other lived realities such as higher levels of loneliness.

By middle-age (after 40), aspiration tends to drop away, and experience tends to be most positive for over 65s.

The pessimistic interpretation is that older people experience relatively good cohesion because of life stage and past life experiences (when economic and social conditions had been better).

The optimistic interpretation is one of hope in our young people, who have hope and can be activated for a better future.

Figure 10: Young people are more aspirational about social cohesion, while older people have more of it



Insight 2: Poverty is a critical driver of *in*-cohesion

Our data confirms Wilkinson and Pickett’s relative deprivation theory.¹ Subjective financial position – how you feel about your finances – is a stronger predictor of social cohesion, better than other objective measures correlated with financial situation, such as housing status and going hungry.

We ran weighted regressions to identify what predicts social cohesion.

Financial circumstances dominate. Compared to someone who is prosperous, a person who is just getting along scores 6.5 points lower on the cohesion index. Someone struggling to pay bills: 9 points lower. Someone who describes themselves as poor: 14.4 points lower. Age matters. Being religious adds 4.6 points. Being female adds one point. But the dominant influence is financial circumstances. So poverty alleviation is a critical social cohesion policy pillar.

But poverty reduction is not the only basis of action available. When we split the analysis into how people feel versus how they act, the results give us hopeful direction. When we focus on how people act (participation, for example), belonging becomes the dominant driver. That is, even among struggling people, those who had a high sense of belonging were just as likely to participate in civic and social activities as those more financially comfortable. This does not mean poverty is not an issue; those in poverty are less likely to feel a sense of belonging. Statistically, the direction of effect is from poverty to a lower feeling of belonging, which then reduces participation. So, policy efforts can work on both poverty relief and belonging infrastructure.²

We see this pattern in housing tenure. Homeowners show 7.4 percentage points higher civic participation and 14 points higher neighbourhood belonging than renters. The likely mechanism is duration in place: ownership creates a stake in the community that, over time, anchors both belonging and participation. Renting disrupts this process, because transience limits the time needed for belonging to develop. This matters given that half of adults now rent. Policies need to simultaneously increase housing supply, strengthen long-term tenure security and tenant rights for renters, and invest in mixed-use community spaces, institutions, networks that enable belonging independently of whether someone owns their home.

¹ Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. Allen Lane.

² For a closer look at what meaningful policy efforts require to animate social cohesion, and where they commonly fall short, see our companion study of the UK’s social cohesion policy system.

Insight 3: Isolation can lead to oppositional engagement

While more people feel isolated (sometimes or often), this does not necessarily mean less engagement. Isolated people are more likely to attend protests (19% vs 12%) and post political views online (32% vs 22%). But they vote less: 75% versus 85%. Isolation appears to shift the form of participation rather than reduce it: toward visible, collective, expressive, and oppositional forms of action, and away from institutional channels like voting.

This pattern is not unique to New Zealand. European research finds that loneliness is associated with higher participation in direct political action (protests, boycotts, petitions) and lower participation in voting.³ The likely cause is a 're-affiliation mechanism': protests and demonstrations offer community and purpose, versus voting as a solitary act that requires a belief in the system, which is usually low for those who feel isolated.

In our survey, Green voters report 61% isolation compared to National voters at 39%. Green voters are also among the most likely to attend protests, boycott products, and post politics online. NZ First voters report 50% dissatisfaction with their financial situation and are the most likely to say the system needs major change or replacement. The pattern holds across the political spectrum; isolation does not push people uniformly left or right.

³ Langenkamp, A. (2021). Enhancing, suppressing or something in between – loneliness and five forms of political participation across Europe. *European Societies*, 23(3), 311–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2021.1916554>

Insight 4: Contact reduces prejudice

Putnam argued in 2007 that ethnic diversity reduces social capital.⁴ In contrast, Allport's⁵ seminal contact hypothesis is that intergroup contact reduces prejudice.

Our data, combined with other surveys, shows that while the majority support multiculturalism, this support has been gradually eroding over time.

We also found that having ethnically diverse friends positively predicts both national and neighbourhood belonging, as well as more accepting attitudes towards immigrants and multiculturalism. Each additional diverse friend increases the likelihood of strong belonging by about half a percentage point.

Taken together, these findings help identify both the sources of risk and the mechanisms that can mitigate them. Notably, our companion study of UK social cohesion policy shows that proximity alone does not lead to connection without deliberate investment in the relational conditions that enable meaningful and ongoing contact. Evidence from the UK suggests that sustained, place-based programmes, such as community language classes or work-oriented initiatives like community gardens and repair workshops, are among the most effective approaches for fostering cross-ethnic friendships. Success lies in creating active opportunities for repeated, meaningful interaction around shared practical goals.



⁴ Putnam, R. D. (2007). *E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century*. The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2), 137-174.

⁵ Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Insight 5: Social media use is widespread

Social media use is widespread: 8 in 10 New Zealanders use it at least once a day, and 62% check in several times a day.

The raw numbers suggest social media users are worse off: more isolated, less financially satisfied, less likely to feel life is worthwhile. However, there are confounding effects of life stage and financial wellbeing, meaning we cannot see a clear causal link in our data.

What we can see through multiple tests is that:

- there are diverging outcomes from social media use. Some use it frequently but score highly across a range of social cohesion metrics, while others don't. There is no one dominant pattern
- those who consume a wide variety of media tend to also report broad positive outcomes. This is especially true for those under 50
- two types of platform users stand out as having low trust in institutions: those who use X and Reddit. This doesn't establish causation, rather association of heavy users of these platforms, who also report low trust
- those who are disengaged from all media are also disengaged from social and civic activities.

We cannot yet draw strong conclusions from this data. Additional metrics, such as extroversion (which we do not collect) could be affecting the outcome (social people engaging in real and online lives). However, the widespread use of social media suggests that understanding strategies online and in real life can lead to good outcomes that would benefit users.



What next?



What next?

The data tells us three things about where to focus. Financial stress is the dominant driver of low cohesion, and no amount of community programming can compensate for economic policy that leaves people behind.

Contact across difference works, but it needs the right conditions: sustained, local, and embedded in everyday life rather than one-off events. And social media is now the background environment for civic life, with effects that vary enormously depending on how people use it and which platforms they trust.

The gap in our knowledge is not what matters to New Zealanders, but how to improve social cohesion in practice. We know belonging anchors participation, diverse friendships reduce prejudice, and isolation pushes people toward oppositional engagement. What we do not yet know enough about is what practitioners and communities are doing that shifts these outcomes in practice.

We are currently conducting in-depth interviews with experts and practitioners across New Zealand to understand this. The focus is on three areas: how social cohesion is taught and practised in communities, how leadership can raise awareness and counter negative stereotypes, and how policy and funding can create the conditions for social interaction that builds trust over time.

A companion report on lessons from the UK's experience with social cohesion policy is published alongside this report. It finds that even well-resourced efforts fail when they fund intermittent activity rather than enduring relationships, evaluate outputs rather than trust, and operate on short political cycles. Those lessons shape the questions we are asking in our New Zealand interviews.



Box 2: The UK's experience and lessons for good policy

The United Kingdom shares a colonial history with Aotearoa, has long experience of immigration and ethnic diversity, and has articulated strong ambitions to improve social cohesion. It has produced strategies, programmes, evaluations, and white papers and spent significant resources investigating solutions. That makes it a useful case: the gap between stated intent and lived outcome has lessons for us.

A well-populated landscape, poorly designed

Across approximately 55 illustrative UK policy actions, we identified five styles of government activity: soft power (campaigns, narratives), mediating power (deliberation, repair), provisioning power (funding, assets), sanctioning power (law, enforcement), and structural power (redistribution, devolution). The UK has actions across all five categories. But having a full toolkit does not mean it translates into better lived experiences for more people. Our study focused on the quality of lived relations and changes in intuitive social knowledge that resulted from the UK's style of intervention, and found limited evidence of the UK valuing the types of relationship required for sustaining social cohesion over time.

Three structural problems cut across the landscape.

First, short-termism. Most cohesion initiatives have not lasted long enough to matter. A 2023 Local Government Association review of over 400 grants found nearly one-third were allocated through competitive processes, advantaging larger organisations and generating administrative burden. Communities often end up owning assets they cannot afford to sustain.

Second, evaluation that misses what matters in terms of meaningful, durative relationships, particularly where meaning is made through navigating situations of uncertainty, conflict, and competing priorities to work together. National evaluations instead focus on inputs and outputs, such as the amount of funds allocated, events delivered, or houses built. By comparison, longitudinal measurement of trust or relationship quality is rare.

Third, economic policy running in the opposite direction. Cohesion programmes have operated alongside economic policy rather than as situated within it. For example, the *Prevent* programme embedded contradictory logics of trust-building and surveillance within the same communities, in the same period, with public money.

The UK system is sophisticated at technical knowledge. It can fund events, build facilities, produce evidence, and deploy policy frameworks. But its policy leaders struggle to see or value the types of practical knowledge communities need to adapt, navigate disagreement, and look after each other in the long-run. This is the type of social knowledge that is hidden and lives in relationships, which is specific and complex, easily lost when resourcing structures shift.

The Pride in Place blind spot

The UK's Pride in Place Theory of Change is a good example of this. The long-term outcomes the framework specifies include 'increased social capital' and 'improved social fabric', but in practice, every input is either a physical asset, a policing measure, an event, or a governance framework. There is no input that funds ongoing relational work or commitments to animating social practices, meaning:

- trust and belonging are treated as outputs of activity, not preconditions
- community engagement is framed as participation in structures, with little appreciation of the role of agency and shared authorship
- conflict is only ever a problem to be solved, never a practice to be held as a source of meaning-making and relationship quality
- there is no plan for persistence: by 2023, only around 10% of Levelling Up funds had been spent by councils, and following the 2024 change of government the programme was rebranded, restructured, and in parts scaled back.⁶

What this means for New Zealand

Our survey shows a similar pattern the UK evidence illuminates. Cohesion tied to who we are (sense of national identity, values) has held, but cohesion tied to how the system treats us (whether it is fair, whether institutions can be trusted, whether our neighbourhood is improving) is weakening under prolonged pressures. Less than half of us see New Zealand as a land of opportunity or have trust in government. Nearly a quarter say their local area is worsening.

Four things follow.

- Fund for continuity. Short funding cycles destroy the practical knowledge and relationships that cohesion requires. Multi-year, operationally flexible funding is a precondition, not a nice-to-have.
- Evaluate relationships, not events. New Zealand needs evaluation methods that measure trust, pluralistic leadership development, and communities' capacity to navigate disagreement.
- Share authority and agency. Communities that hold budgets and set priorities themselves form meaning by being situated in living relationships with accountability and consequences. Delivering activity for others instead engages communities but in ways that look like asking for attendance rather than material empowerment.
- Align economic and cohesion policy. The dimensions of cohesion most in decline are those tied to economic fairness. Economic settings that determine whether people feel the system works for them are a cohesion issue.

Social cohesion is not produced by delivering the right combination of activities to communities. It is produced by creating the conditions in which communities can develop their own capacity to navigate difference, hold difficult conversations, and look after each other over time.

Full companion report: Collins, R., Knights, C., & Eaqub, S. (2026). *Social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand: Lessons from the UK*. The Helen Clark Foundation.

⁶ House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (2024). "Levelling Up Funding to Local Government," Sixty-Sixth Report of Session 2023-24, HC 424. House of Commons. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/news/200377/levelling-up-no-compelling-examples-of-delivery-so-far-as-delays-hold-back-spending/>.

Table 1: Key results for 2024 and 2025

Domain & question	Statement	2024	2025	Difference	
Domain 1: Sense of belonging	Take pride in the New Zealand way of life and culture	80%	81%	1%	
	Have a sense of belonging in New Zealand	82%	84%	2%	
	People in my local area are willing to help their neighbours	66%	63%	-3%	
	My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get on well together	64%	62%	-1%	
	I am able to have a real say on issues that are important to me in my local area	41%	38%	-3%	
	I feel like I belong in my neighbourhood	62%	62%	-1%	
	My neighbourhood has a strong sense of community	53%	51%	-3%	
	Would you say that living in your local area is becoming better or worse, or is it unchanged?	22%	18%	-3%	
	How often do you feel isolated from others?	50%	50%	0%	
	How safe do you feel at home by yourself during the day?	90%	90%	0%	
	How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your local area?	57%	57%	0%	
	Thinking about all types of crime in general, how worried are you about becoming a victim of crime in your local area?	60%	61%	2%	
	Domain 2: Sense of worth	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your present financial situation?	32%	34%	1%
To what extent do you feel that people treat you with respect?		77%	75%	-2%	
Taking ALL things into consideration, would you say that over the last year you have been happy?		55%	56%	1%	
During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel the things you do in your life were worthwhile?		54%	54%	-1%	
Over the last 12 months, "You / your household went without meals because there wasn't enough money for food"		75%	75%	0%	
Domain 3: Social inclusion & justice		New Zealand is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life	51%	45%	-7%
		People living on low incomes in New Zealand receive enough financial support from the government	40%	35%	-5%
	Overall, everyone in New Zealand has a fair chance of getting the jobs they seek	39%	31%	-8%	
	In New Zealand today, the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large	31%	29%	-2%	
	Elections are fair	57%	51%	-6%	
	How often do you think government leaders in New Zealand abuse their power?	31%	24%	-7%	
	In your opinion, how often do the courts make fair, impartial decisions based on the evidence made available to them?	57%	45%	-12%	
	How often do you think the government in Wellington can be trusted to do the right thing for the New Zealand people?	42%	39%	-3%	
	Would you say the system of government we have in New Zealand works fine as is?	17%	12%	-4%	
	Would the following be a good or bad way to govern in New Zealand				
	A democracy, in which the members of parliament are chosen in an election	81%	80%	0%	
	Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections	32%	28%	-4%	
	Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country	53%	52%	0%	

Domain 4: Participation

Which of the following have you done over the last three years or so?

Written or spoken to a Member of Parliament	Yes	19%	18%	-1%
Joined a boycott of a product or company	Yes	17%	18%	0%
Posted or shared anything about politics online	Yes	25%	24%	-1%
Attended a protest or hiko	Yes	17%	14%	-3%
Voted in a general election	Yes	81%	80%	-1%
Voted in a local (council) election	Yes	67%	70%	4%

In the last 12 months, have you been actively involved in any:

Community support groups	Yes	25%	25%	0%
Social or religious groups	Yes	30%	27%	-3%
Civic or political groups	Yes	10%	9%	-1%

In the last 4 weeks, did you help anyone (not living with you) with any of the following activities?

Providing transport or running errands	Yes	45%	43%	-1%
Any teaching, coaching, or practical advice	Yes	38%	39%	1%
Providing any emotional support	Yes	59%	57%	-2%

Domain 5: Acceptance and rejection

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The relationship between Māori and the wider New Zealand community is very important for New Zealand as a nation
 It is important for Indigenous histories and cultures to be included in the school curriculum
 Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes New Zealand stronger
 Ethnic minorities in New Zealand SHOULD be given New Zealand government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions

5.1 Immigration

What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into New Zealand in recent years?

How strongly do you agree or disagree:	Not too high	65%	64%	-1%
Immigrants make good citizens	Agree	70%	65%	-5%
Immigrants are good for the economy	Agree	62%	61%	-1%
Immigrants improve society	Agree	56%	53%	-3%

New Zealand should reject immigrants on the basis of religion or ethnicity
 Immigrants take away jobs

Migrant diversity makes New Zealand stronger	Agree	51%	47%	-3%
Immigrants are not adopting New Zealand values	Agree	56%	54%	-3%
Minorities should be given government assistance	Agree	50%	47%	-3%
Multiculturalism is good for New Zealand	Do not agree	83%	84%	1%
Which of the following is closest to your views?	Do not agree	70%	69%	-1%

Which of the following is closest to your views?

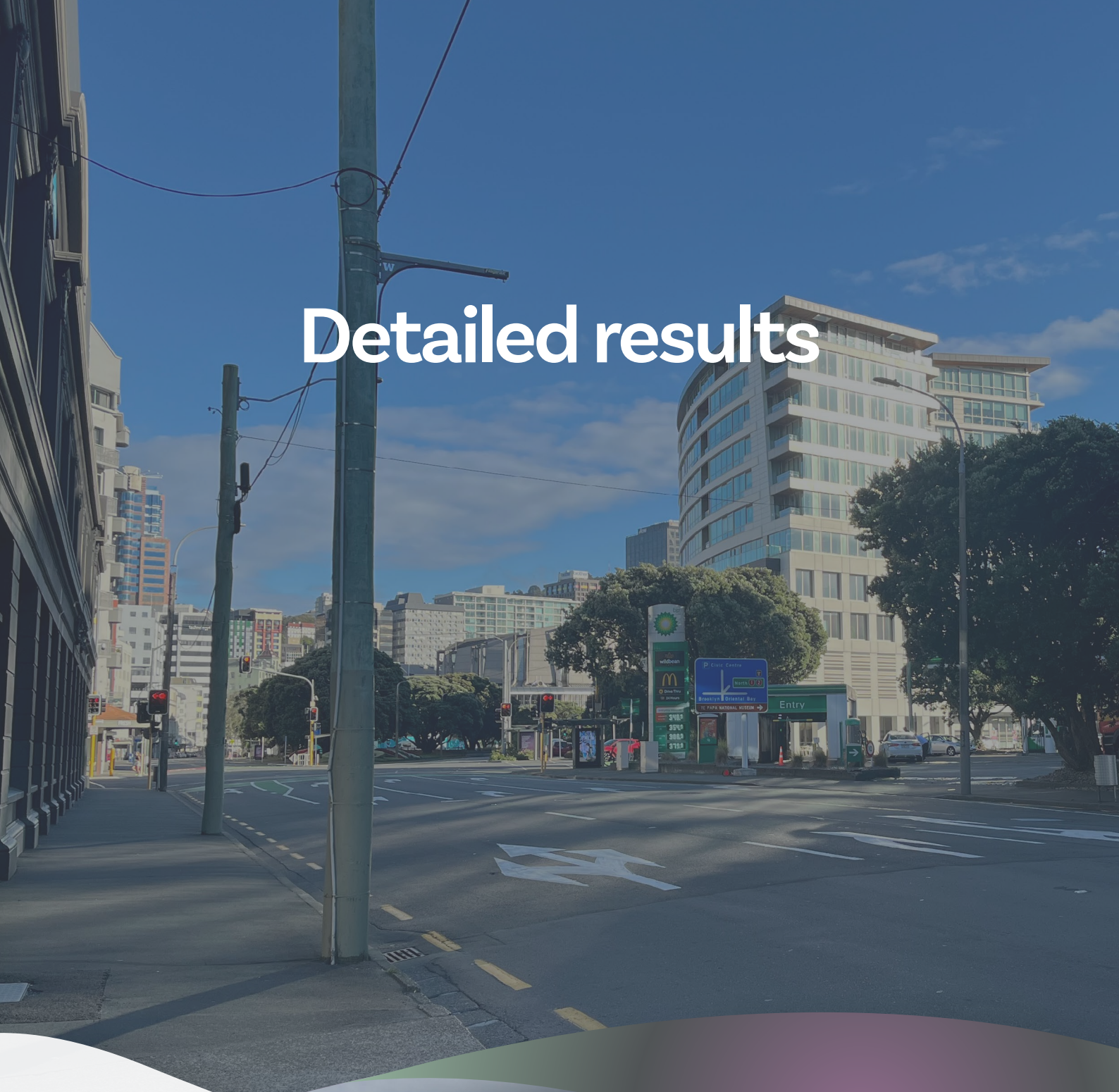
New immigrants are adding to the richness of New Zealand life	Agree	56%	53%	-4%
Increasing numbers of new immigrants are threatening New Zealand's unique sense of identity	Do not agree	63%	61%	-2%
Closest	Agree	31%	27%	-3%
Not closest	Agree	68%	67%	-1%

5.3 Discrimination

Have you experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the last year?

How big of a problem is racism in New Zealand?	No	83%	83%	0%
	Not a problem	45%	45%	0%

Detailed results



Problems facing New Zealand

New Zealanders' concerns remain dominated by cost pressures and housing affordability, followed by unemployment and fears about global economic downturn.

Cost pressures affect 85% of New Zealanders, with women more concerned (91%) than men (79%). Older people (88%) express more concern than those under 30 (81%), and Pasifika respondents show the highest concern at 88%.

Housing affordability worries 78% overall. The concern is sharpest among renters (91%), students (92%), and under-30s (88%), compared to mortgage-free homeowners (66%). Pasifika respondents (91%) report the highest concern, followed by Māori (86%).

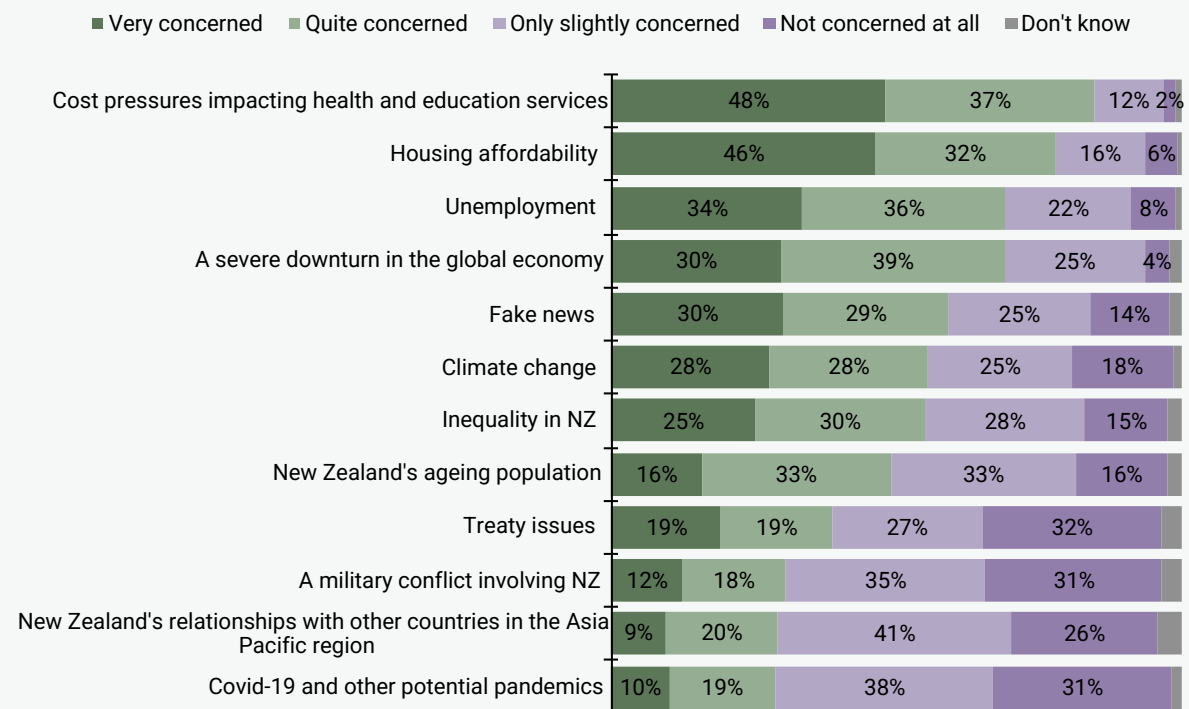
Unemployment concerns 69% overall, with young people (75%) more worried than those over 60 (65%). Asian (86%) and Pasifika (84%) respondents express elevated concern.

Global economic downturn worries 69% equally across the population. **Fake news and misinformation** concerns 59%, with particular weight among those managing financial stress.

Climate change concerns 56%, and **inequality** concerns 55%.

Treaty issues remain a source of concern for 39%, but this represents a substantial drop of 12 percentage points from the prior year. Māori (64%) and Pasifika (61%) respondents remain far more concerned than NZ European respondents (35%), and young people (47%) are more concerned than those aged 45-59 (31%).

How concerned are you about the following?



Sense of belonging

Pride and belonging

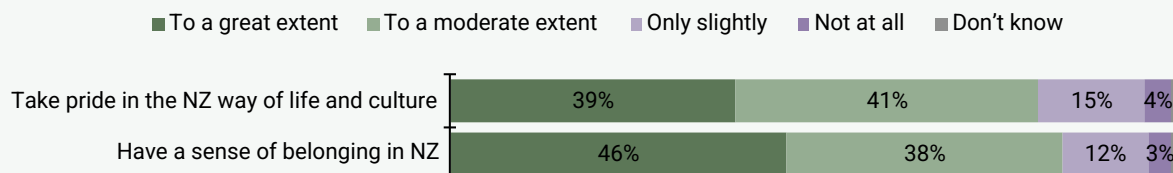
Among New Zealanders, 84% report a sense of belonging to the country, with 81% expressing pride in New Zealand. Both measures are stable year on year, with belonging up just 2 percentage points from 2024.

Older New Zealanders (90% belonging, 85% pride) report the strongest attachment, while those under 30 (83%, 79% respectively) are slightly lower. Asian respondents (80%, 78%) and those from 'other' ethnic backgrounds (72%, 72%) show the softest identification. Pasifika and Māori respondents report slightly stronger belonging (86%, 87% pride) than NZ European respondents (86%, 81%).

Financial stress matters. Those who describe themselves as prosperous report 85% belonging and 85% pride, compared to 75% and 66% among those who report struggling. People who own their home outright (88%, 83%) show stronger belonging than those renting (84%, 79%) or on mortgages (81%, 77%). Disabled respondents report lower belonging (80%) and pride (73%) than non-disabled respondents (85%, 82%).

New Zealand-born respondents (86%) report stronger belonging than those born overseas (79%). This aligns with overseas-born respondents being disproportionately represented among recent immigrants and younger age cohorts, groups that show somewhat lower attachment overall.

To what extent do you ___?



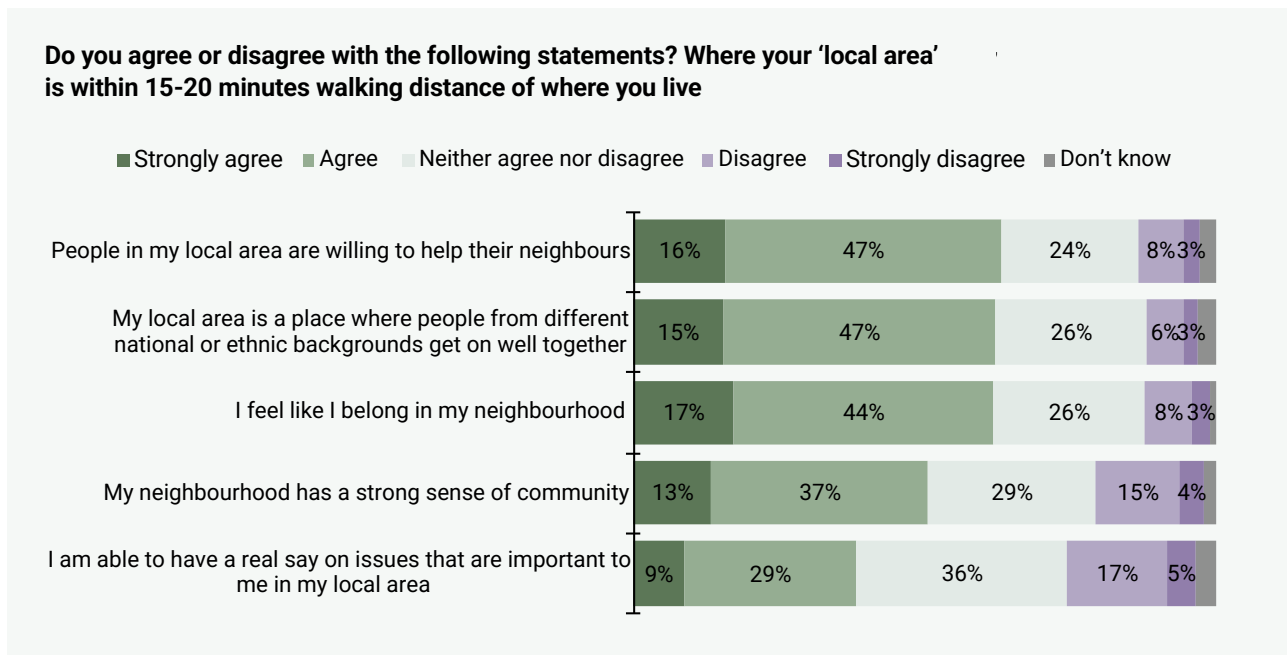
Neighbourhood dynamics

Among New Zealanders, 63% agree that their neighbours would be willing to help them. This is down 3 percentage points from 2024. Similarly, 62% agree they belong in their neighbourhood, and 62% agree their neighbourhood is diverse and welcoming. Only 51% report a strong sense of community in their local area, down from 53% in 2024.

Older people consistently show stronger neighbourhood bonds. Of those aged 60+, 66% agree that neighbours would help, compared to 59% for those under 30. For neighbourhood belonging, the gap widens to 68% (60+) versus 59% (under 30). Those on lower incomes diverge sharply. Among people describing themselves as prosperous, 70% agree that neighbours would help, versus 53% among those struggling.

Housing tenure matters. Homeowners who own outright (67%) are substantially more likely to believe neighbours would help than renters do (58%). For neighbourhood belonging, the gap is wider still: 70% of outright owners versus 53% for renters. Disabled respondents report lower agreement across all neighbourhood measures, with 65% agreement on helpful neighbours and 57% on neighbourhood belonging compared to 63% and 62% for non-disabled respondents.

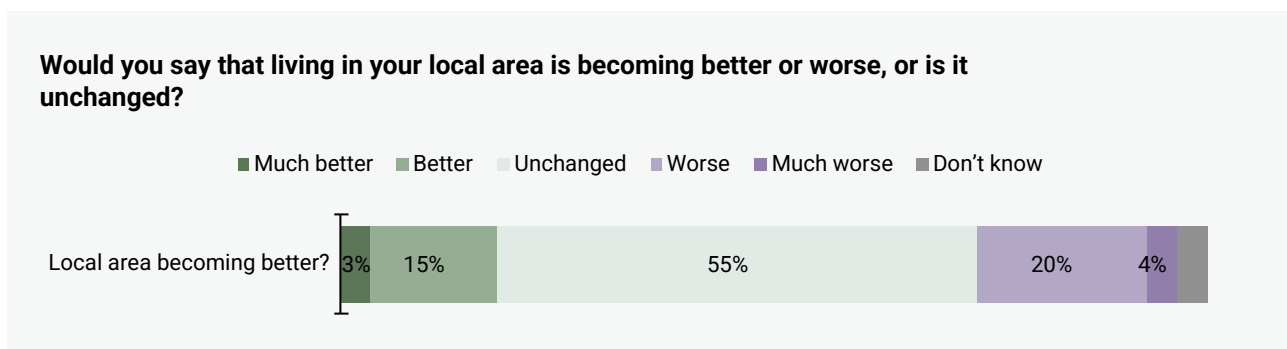
Real say on local issues shows a steeper decline. Only 38% agree they have a real say in what happens with local issues affecting them, down 4 percentage points from 2024. Financial circumstances again diverge significantly: prosperous respondents report 47% agreement versus struggling respondents at 34%.



Local area change

Among New Zealanders, 18% report their local area has improved over the past year, down from 22% in 2024. In contrast, 55% report no change, and 23% report their area has gotten worse.

Younger people (30% of those under 30) are more optimistic about local improvement than older people (12% of those 60+). Those describing themselves as prosperous (30%) are substantially more optimistic than those struggling (11%), who instead are more likely to see decline (35%). Across the country, Auckland residents are most pessimistic, with 27% reporting their area has gotten worse. Disabled respondents (28%) are more likely than non-disabled respondents (22%) to report decline.

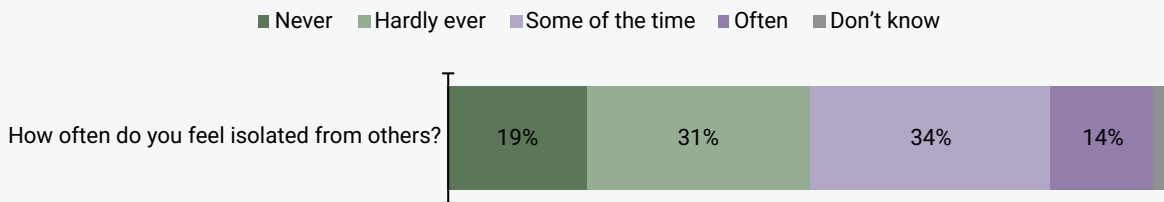


Isolation

Of New Zealanders, 48% report feeling isolated at least some of the time, down from 50% in 2024. Young people experience isolation at much higher rates: 62% of those under 30 report isolation, dropping to 46% for those aged 45-59 and 32% for those aged 60+. Students (69%) and unemployed people (65%) report the highest rates.

Financial stress is a strong predictor. Those describing themselves as struggling report 65% isolation versus 30% for the prosperous. Renters (60%) are substantially more isolated than those who own outright (34%). Disabled respondents (59%) report higher isolation than non-disabled respondents (45%). Green Party voters report 61% isolation compared to National voters at 39%, likely reflecting differences in age and financial circumstance.

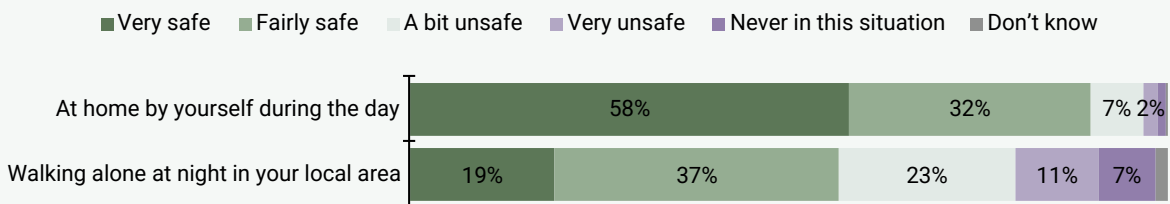
How often do you feel isolated from others?



Safety

Most New Zealanders (90%) report feeling safe walking around their local area during the day. Walking at night shows a sharper divergence: 57% feel safe. Women report lower safety at night than men, though precise figures vary by age cohort. Financial circumstances correlate with safety perception, with the prosperous more likely to feel safe than those struggling. Disabled respondents report somewhat lower safety across both day and night measures.

How safe do you feel?

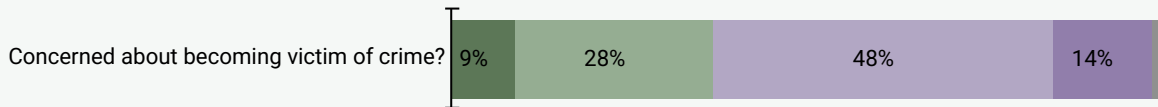


Worry about crime

Among New Zealanders, 37% are very or quite worried about crime, down 3 percentage points from 2024. Of these, 9% are very worried and 28% are quite worried. This decline aligns with stable crime statistics and suggests some shift in perception. Demographic patterns align with age and financial stress: older people and those with more financial security are less worried overall.

Thinking about all types of crime in general, how worried are you about becoming a victim of crime in your local area?

Very worried Fairly worried Not that worried Not at all worried Don't know



Sense of worth

Financial satisfaction

Among New Zealanders, 34% are satisfied with their financial situation, compared to 41% who are dissatisfied. This is up slightly (2 percentage points) from 2024.

Financial satisfaction tracks closely with self-assessed financial position. Those describing themselves as prosperous report 83% satisfaction, while those struggling report just 2% satisfaction and 68% dissatisfaction. The middle groups show a gradient: those living reasonably comfortably report 53% satisfaction, while those just getting along report 7%.

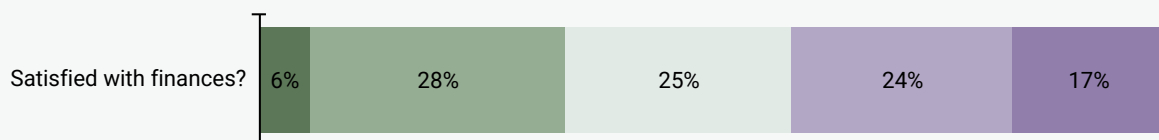
Age brings a clear difference. Those aged 60+ (45% satisfied) are substantially more satisfied than under-30s (26%), likely because older cohorts are more likely to own their homes outright, have stable employment, or have access to universal welfare (NZ Superannuation).

Gender shows 38% satisfaction for men versus 29% for women. Housing tenure is revealing: those who own outright (56%) are far more satisfied than those on mortgages (32%) or renting (17%). Unemployed respondents (12% satisfied) show severe dissatisfaction (68% dissatisfied).

Ethnic breakdown shows Pasifika respondents (19% satisfied, 54% dissatisfied) are substantially more dissatisfied than NZ European respondents (36% satisfied, 41% dissatisfied), with Māori (24% satisfied) in between. Disabled respondents report 24% satisfaction compared to 36% for non-disabled respondents.

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your present financial situation?

■ Very satisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied ■ Don't know

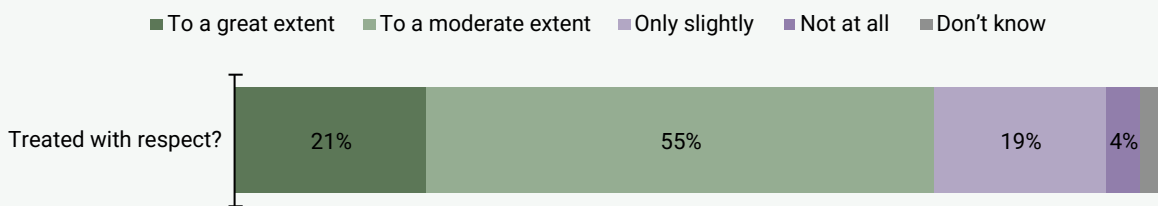


Respect

The majority of New Zealanders (75%) report being treated with respect most or all of the time, down from 77% in 2024.

Age shows a clear gradient: those aged 60+ (83%) report higher respect than under-30s (71%). Gender shows 77% for men versus 73% for women. Financial position diverges sharply: prosperous respondents (87%) versus struggling respondents (56%). Housing tenure matters: those owning outright (82%) versus renters (71%). Disabled respondents (63%) report substantially lower respect than non-disabled respondents (78%). Ethnicity shows NZ European respondents (77%) at the top, followed by Māori (73%), Pasifika (71%), and Asian respondents (69%).

To what extent do you feel that people treat you with respect?

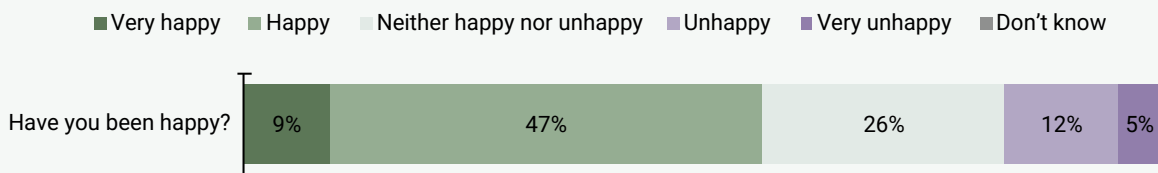


Happiness

Over half of New Zealanders (56%) report being happy or very happy. This is stable from 2024.

Age shows a clear pattern: those aged 60+ (69%) are substantially happier than those aged under 30 (51%), with a dip to 49% for those aged 45-59. Financial position is powerful: prosperous respondents (79%) versus struggling respondents (27%). Housing tenure matters: those owning outright (68%) versus renting (46%). Employment status counts: unemployed respondents report 31% happiness. Disabled respondents (39%) are far less likely to report happiness than non-disabled respondents (60%).

Taking ALL things into consideration, would you say that over the last year you have been...?

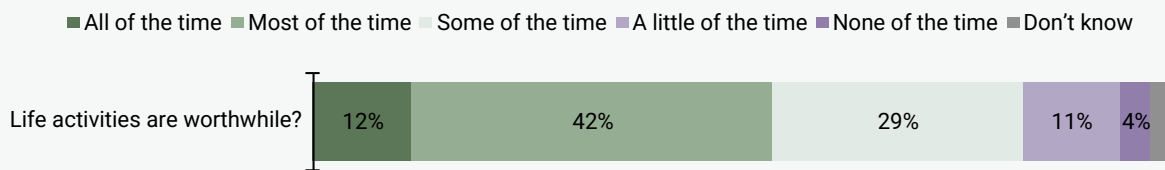


Life feels worthwhile

Over half of New Zealanders (54%) report their life feels worthwhile all or most of the time. This is stable from 2024.

Age shows a pattern: those aged 60+ (65%) versus under-30s (46%). Financial position diverges sharply: prosperous respondents (75%) versus struggling respondents (33%). Unemployed respondents report 31%. Disabled respondents (40%) report substantially lower sense of life's worth than non-disabled respondents (57%).

During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel the things you do in your life were worthwhile?



Food insecurity

Nearly a quarter of New Zealanders (24%) report going without meals at least sometimes, representing a slight improvement from 25% in 2024. Of these, 5% report this happens often and 19% sometimes.

Food insecurity is highly concentrated among vulnerable groups. Young people show the sharpest need: 40% of those aged under 30 report food insecurity, dropping to 22% for those aged 45–59 and 10% for those aged 60+.

Ethnic disparities are severe: Pasifika respondents (41%) and Māori respondents (38%) report far higher food insecurity than Asian respondents (26%) or NZ European respondents (21%).

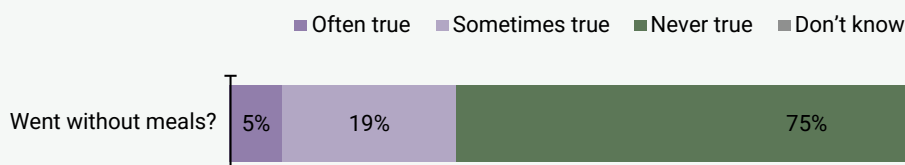
Housing tenure shows a clear divide: renters (39%) versus those with mortgages (21%) versus those owning outright (11%).

Disabled respondents (42%) report substantially higher food insecurity than non-disabled respondents (20%).

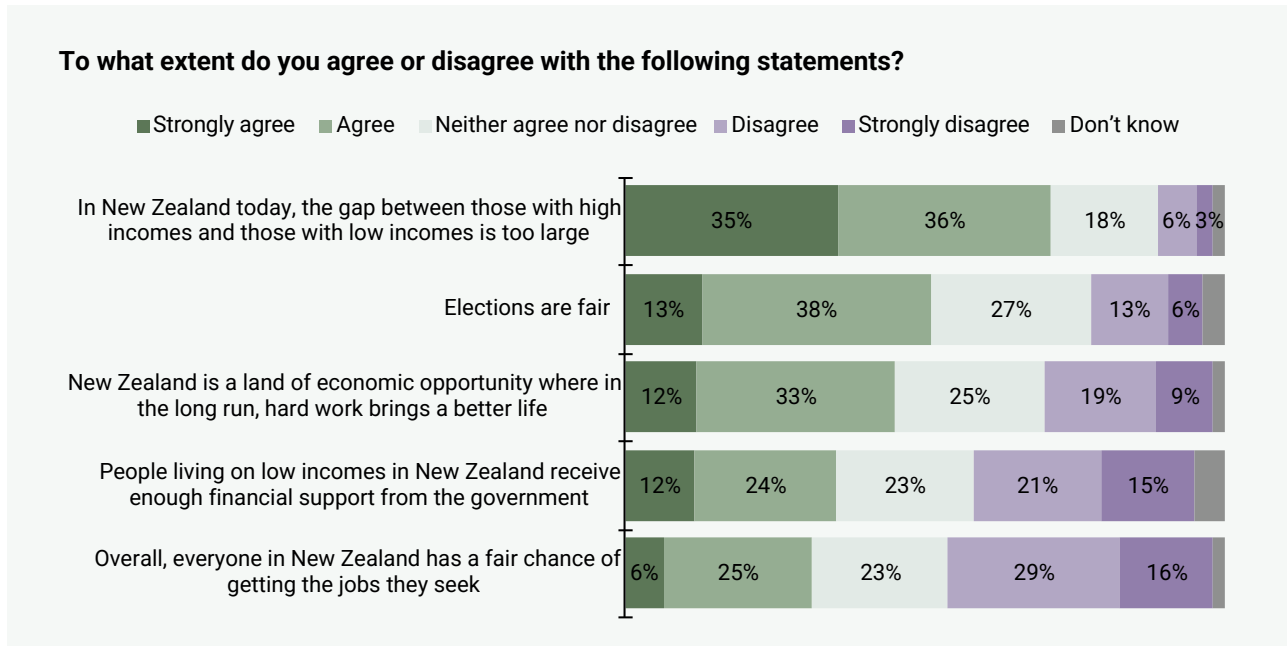
Respondents with children in the household (33%) report higher insecurity than those without (19%).

Fundamentally, these differences show the many faces of poverty.

Over the last 12 months, how often is the following statement true... "You / your household went without meals because there wasn't enough money for food"



Social inclusion and justice



Economic inequality

Among New Zealanders, 71% agree that the gap between high and low incomes is too large. This is one of the most broadly held views in the survey, with agreement high across age groups (70–72%), ethnicities, and regions.

Gender shows a clear split: women (76%) are more likely to agree than men (66%). Financial position tracks as expected: 81% of those struggling agree, compared to 69% of those living comfortably and 52% of the prosperous. Renters (77%) agree at higher rates than mortgage holders (70%) or outright owners (66%). Party vote reveals the widest divergence on this question: Green voters (91%) and Labour voters (89%) overwhelmingly agree, while ACT voters (46%) are the only group where fewer than half agree. National voters sit at 58%.

Low-income support

Among New Zealanders, 35% agree that people living on low incomes receive enough financial support from the government. This is the second-lowest agreement rate among the Social Inclusion questions, behind fair job chances (31%).

The pattern by financial position is counterintuitive at first glance: prosperous respondents (53%) are the most likely to agree, while those struggling (18%) are overwhelmingly unconvinced. This likely reflects direct experience of inadequacy among those who depend on government support. Asian respondents (51%) are the most likely ethnic group to agree, followed by NZ European respondents (33%). Māori (22%) and Pasifika (21%) respondents show the lowest agreement. Men (41%) agree at higher rates than women (30%). Unemployed respondents (21%) are among the least likely to agree, alongside those doing home duties (23%).

Party vote shows wide divergence: ACT voters (64%) and National voters (55%) are far more likely to agree that low-income support is adequate, while Green voters (10%), Te Pāti Māori voters (16%), and Labour voters (19%) largely disagree.

Elections

About half of New Zealanders (51%) agree elections are fair, down from 57% in 2024. This is a 6 percentage point decline in electoral confidence.

Age shows older people (61% aged 60+) are substantially more confident than under-30s (40%). Gender shows men (59%) are more confident than women (44%). Financial position matters: prosperous respondents (62%) versus struggling respondents (35%). Ethnic differences are wide: Māori respondents (32%) show the lowest confidence, followed by Pasifika respondents (39%), compared to NZ European respondents around 55%.

Opportunity

Among New Zealanders, 45% agree New Zealand is a land of opportunity, down from 51% in 2024. This represents a 6 percentage point decline in perceived opportunity.

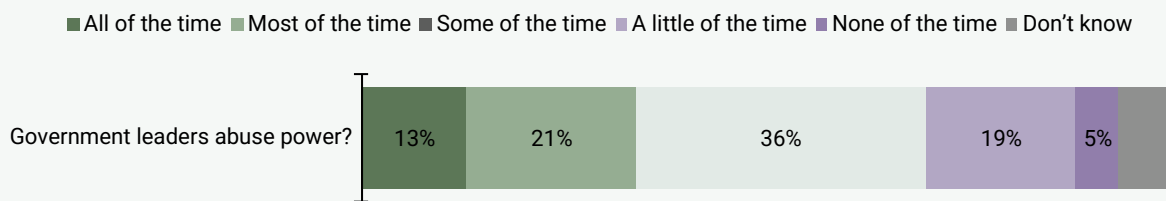
Age shows older people (58% aged 60+) are substantially more optimistic than under-30s (45%). Gender shows men are more optimistic than women. Financial position is a clear predictor: prosperous respondents (63%) are far more optimistic than struggling respondents (29%). The sense that everyone has a fair chance at jobs stands at just 31% overall, down from 39% in 2024. Young people (27% at under 30) are far less likely to see fair job chances than those aged 60+ (36%).

Government power

Among New Zealanders, 34% believe government leaders abuse their power most or all of the time, up from 32% in 2024. This is up 2 percentage points from the prior year.

Pasifika respondents (54%) are substantially more sceptical of government power than NZ European respondents (32%). Age shows a gradient: under-30s (~37%) are more sceptical than those aged 60+ (24%), likely reflecting broader economic and employment concerns. Financial stress correlates: struggling respondents (54%) versus comfortable respondents (27%). Party voters show sharp divergence: Te Pāti Māori voters (71%), Green voters (42%), and Labour voters (43%) are markedly more sceptical than National or ACT voters, though precise breakdowns depend on full crosstabs.

How often do you think government leaders in New Zealand abuse their power?

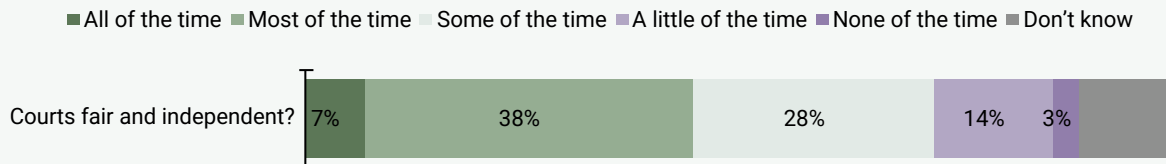


Court decisions

Among New Zealanders, 45% believe courts make fair decisions most or all of the time. This represents a broad base of confidence, though a plurality still express reservations.

Gender shows men (50%) are more confident than women (41%). Age shows older people (56% aged 60+) are more confident than younger people (35% under 30). Financial position matters: prosperous respondents (~60%) versus struggling respondents (33%). This pattern aligns with broader confidence in institutions correlating with financial security and older age.

How often do the courts make fair, impartial decisions based on the evidence made available to them?



Participation

Civic participation

Among New Zealanders, 80% report voting in the general election, with 70% voting in local government elections. These are strong headline rates, though age brings sharp differences.

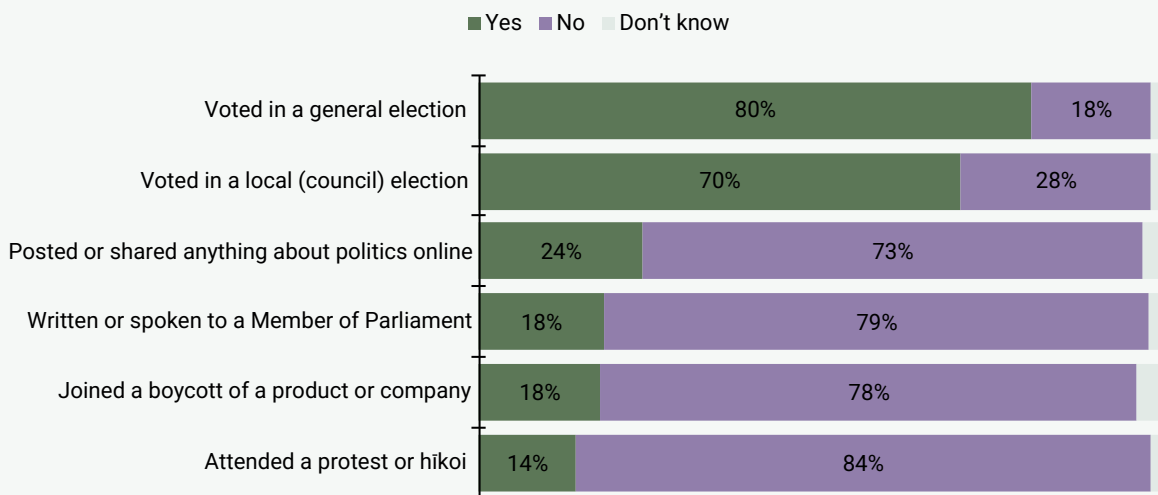
Those aged 60+ report 96% general election voting and 88% local election voting. Those under 30 report 57% general election voting and 48% local voting. Students (42%) report especially low general election voting, likely reflecting lower enrolment and mobility.

Those who own their home outright (89%) are substantially more likely to vote than renters (70%), likely reflecting greater residential stability. Renters may have lower enrolment rates due to recent moves.

Beyond voting, civic engagement is modest. Of the respondents, 23% report posting about politics online, 18% have written to an MP, 18% have participated in a boycott, and 14% have attended a protest. Young people show higher engagement in these direct forms: 29% of under-30s post about politics online (versus lower rates for older age groups), and 25% attend protests (versus 5–10% for older age groups). These patterns align with younger people feeling less influence through conventional electoral channels.

Māori respondents (40% online, 37% protests) show markedly higher engagement in direct political action than other groups. Asian respondents show lower protest engagement (10%).

Which of the following have you done over the last three years or so?

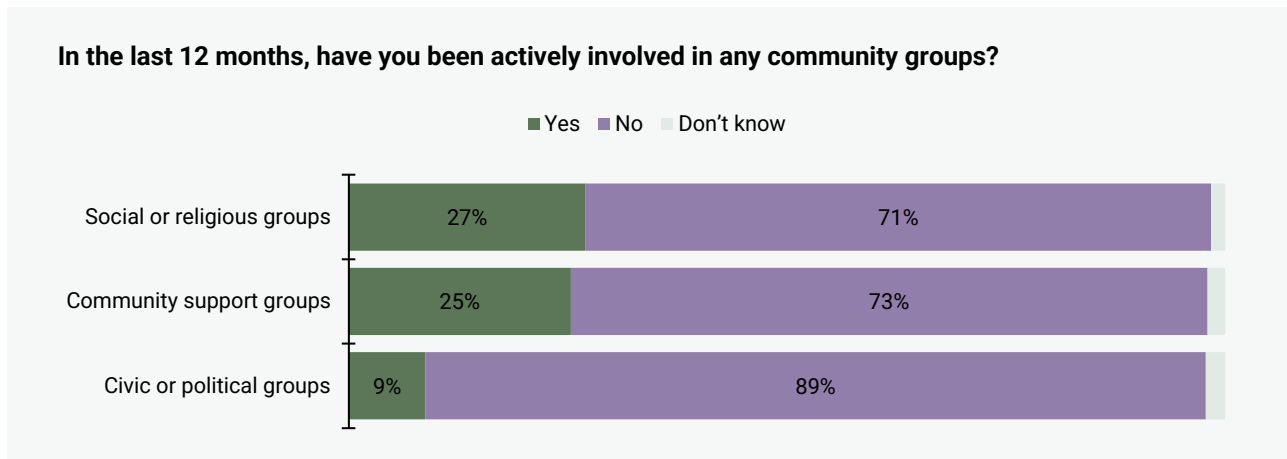


Community involvement

Of New Zealanders, 27% are involved in social, religious, or community groups, down from 30% in 2024. A further 25% provide community support in less formal ways, and 9% are involved in civic or political organisations.

Religious belief strongly predicts involvement: those with religion report 40% in social groups versus 12% for those with no religion. Māori respondents (36%) and Pasifika respondents (42%) show higher involvement than NZ European respondents (23%). Having children in the household (32%) increases involvement compared to those without (24%).

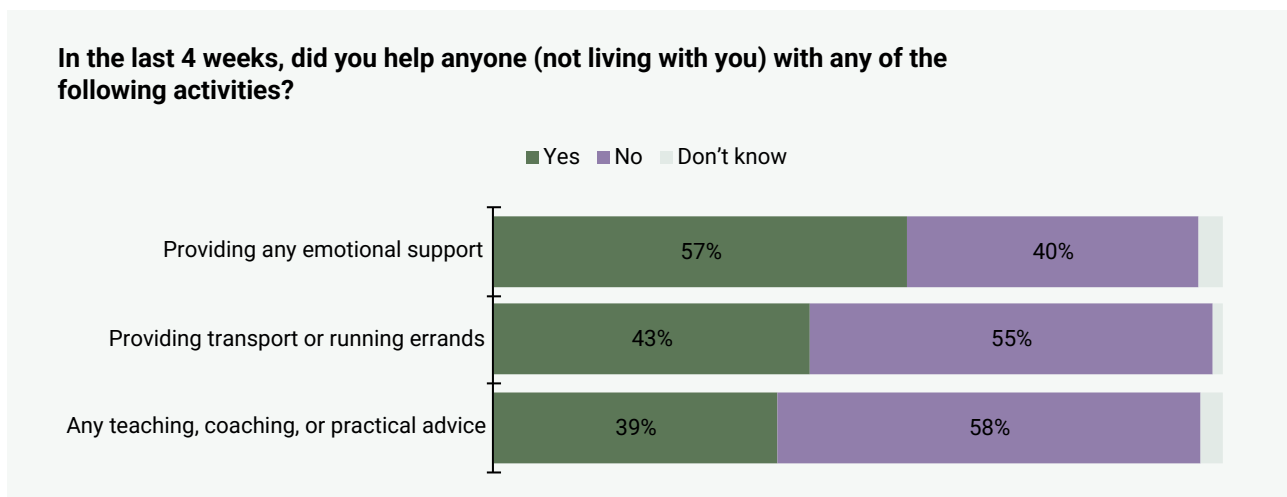
Age shows relatively consistent involvement, with under-30s (29%) and those aged 60+ (28%) similarly engaged, suggesting community involvement appeals across ages but possibly in different forms.



Helping others

Among New Zealanders, 57% provide emotional support to family, friends, or whānau: 43% help with transport or errands, and 39% provide teaching or advice.

Women (66%) are substantially more likely than men (47%) to report providing emotional support. Pasifika respondents (72%) report especially high emotional support provision, followed by Māori respondents (62%). Struggling respondents (64%) report higher emotional support provision than comfortable respondents (55%), possibly reflecting the centrality of whānau networks during financial stress.



Acceptance and rejection

Ethnic inclusion

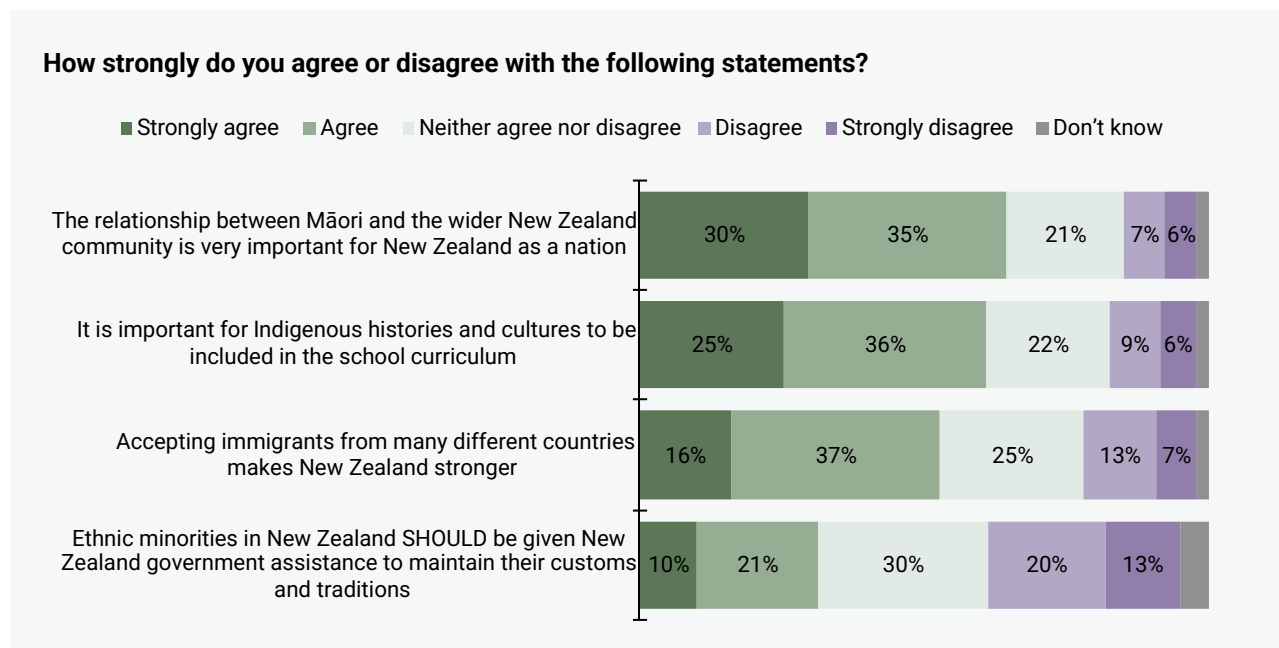
The perceived importance of New Zealand’s relationship with Māori has declined: 65% agree the relationship between Māori and the rest of New Zealand is important, down from 70% in 2024. This represents a 5 percentage point decline.

Māori respondents (83%) overwhelmingly agree on its importance. Women (69%) show higher agreement than men (60%). Young people (72% aged under 30) are more likely to agree than older people (59% aged 60+).

Indigenous histories in the curriculum receives 61% agreement, down slightly from 62%. Māori respondents (78%) show high agreement, contrasting with NZ European respondents around 55%.

Immigration makes New Zealand stronger receives 53% agreement, down 3 percentage points from 56% in 2024. This reflects global trends around migration sentiment. Asian respondents (67%) are most positive, followed by NZ European respondents (51%), with Pasifika respondents somewhat lower. Under-30s (51%) are more positive than older age groups.

Government assistance for ethnic minorities receives only 31% agreement. Young people (51% at under 30) are substantially more supportive than those aged 60+ (17%). This represents a 34 percentage point age gap and reflects divergent views on government’s role in addressing historical and ongoing disparities.

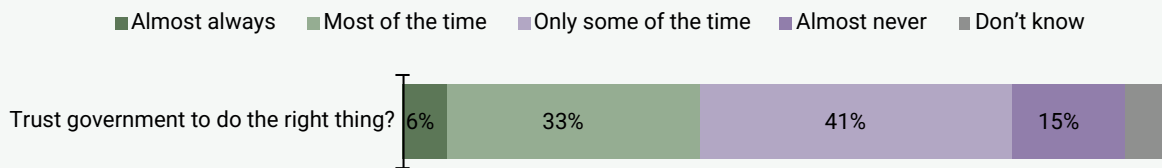


Government trust

Among New Zealanders, 39% trust government to do the right thing most or all of the time, down from 42% in 2024. This represents a decline in institutional trust.

Age shows a pattern: those aged 60+ (48%) are substantially more trusting than those aged under 30 (37%). Gender shows men (44%) are more trusting than women (35%). Financial position matters: prosperous respondents (~56%) versus struggling respondents (~22%), a 34 percentage point gap. Ethnicity shows Asian respondents (48%) are most trusting, NZ European (39%), Pasifika (27%), and Māori (28%) the least trusting. These ethnic patterns reflect historical and ongoing differences in institutional experience.

How often do you think the government in Wellington can be trusted to do the right thing for the New Zealand people?

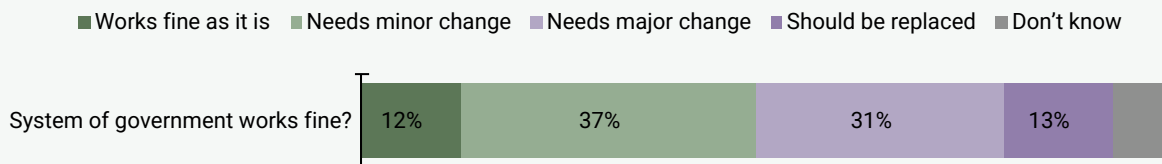


System of government

Only 12% of New Zealanders believe the system of government works fine as it is, down 4 percentage points from 2024. 37% believe it needs minor changes, 33% believe it needs major changes, and 11% believe it should be replaced entirely.

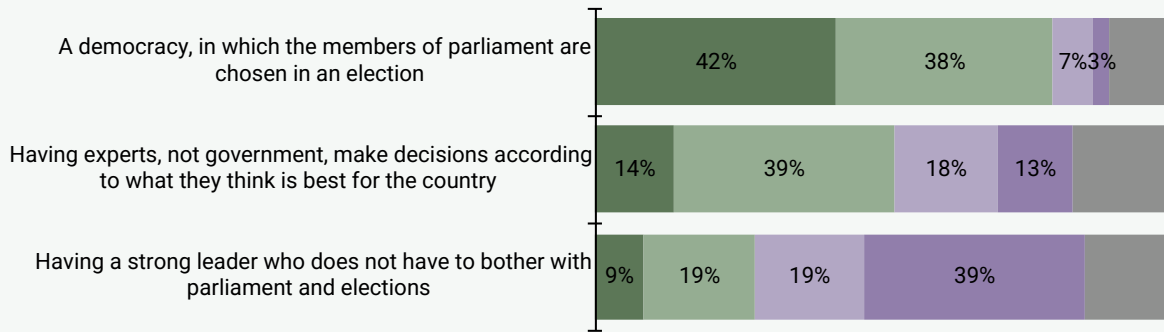
The combined figure of 44% wanting major change or replacement is up 6 percentage points from 2024. This reflects increasing dissatisfaction with existing institutional arrangements. Age, financial position, and party vote all show strong patterns. Those aged 60+ are more accepting of the current system than those aged under 30. Prosperous respondents are more accepting than struggling respondents. Party voters show marked differences, with Green and Te Pāti Māori voters far more likely to want major change or replacement than National or ACT voters.

Would you say the system of government we have in New Zealand works fine as is?



Would the following be a good or bad way to govern in New Zealand?

Very good Fairly good Fairly bad Very bad Don't know



Discrimination

Among New Zealanders, 17% report having experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity, or national origins in the past year. Ethnic disparities are large. Pasifika respondents (30%) and Māori respondents (27%) report the highest rates, followed by Asian respondents (26%) and those from other ethnic backgrounds (20%). NZ European respondents report 12%.

Age shows a clear gradient. Those aged 30–44 (18%) and 45–59 (18%) report higher discrimination than those aged 60+ (11%). Students (23%) and unemployed respondents (20%) report elevated rates. Financial circumstances track with discrimination: 25% of those struggling report discrimination, compared to 18% of those just getting along and 12% of those living comfortably. Those born overseas (19%) report higher discrimination than those born in New Zealand.

Over half of New Zealanders (55%) consider racism to be a big or somewhat big problem. Women (60%) are more likely than men to see racism as a problem. Pasifika respondents (71%) see it as the most pressing, compared to NZ European respondents (54%) and Asian respondents (54%). Those aged 60+ (50%) are less likely to see racism as a problem than younger age groups. Those who are struggling financially (64%) are more likely to see racism as a problem than those living comfortably (51%).

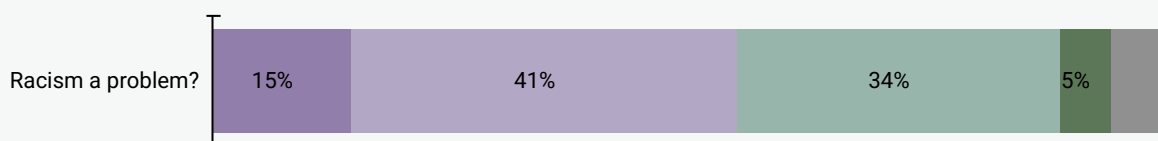
Have you experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion in the last 12 months?

Yes No Prefer not to say



How big of a problem is racism in New Zealand?

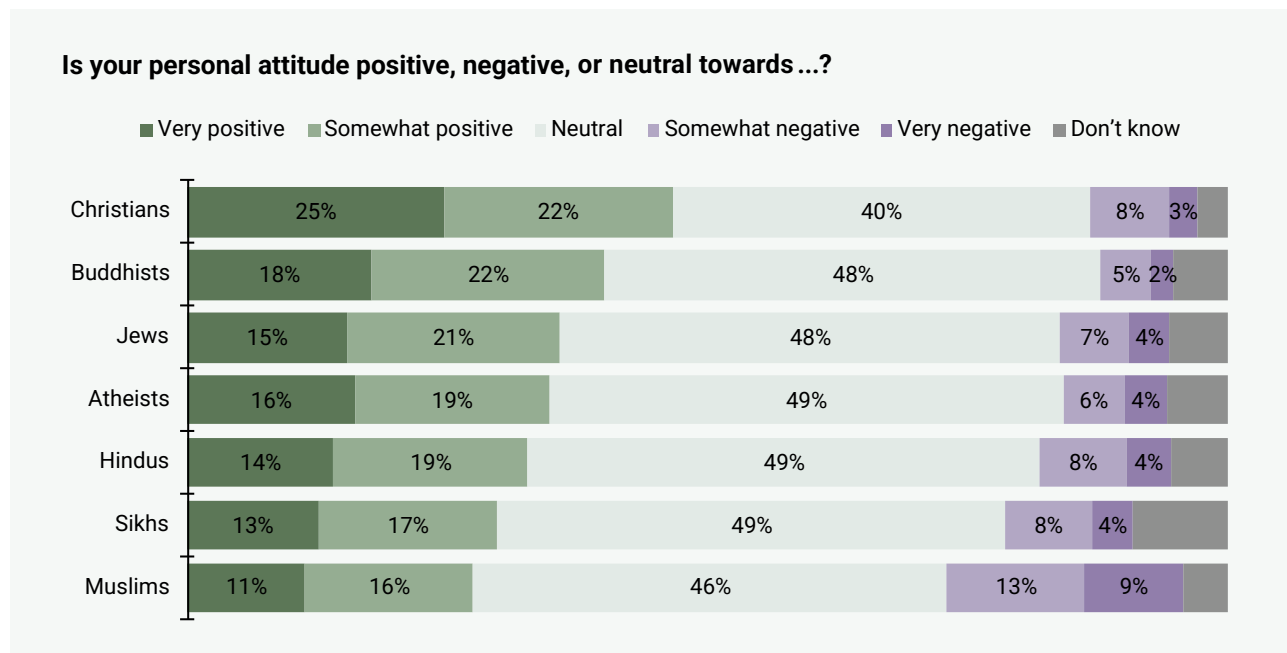
A very big problem Fairly big problem A small problem Not a problem Don't know



Attitudes toward religious groups

Attitudes toward religious groups follow a hierarchy too. Christians attract the highest positive attitudes (47%), followed by Buddhists (40%), Jews (36%), Atheists (35%), Hindus (33%), Sikhs (30%), and Muslims (28%).

Religious identity shapes these responses. Those with any religion report 64% positivity toward Christians, while those with no religion report just 26%. Green voters (54%) are the most positive toward Atheists, while NZ First voters (27%) are the least. Te Pāti Māori voters (47%) are the most positive toward Muslims, compared to NZ First voters (9%). Pasifika respondents show high positivity toward Christians (61%) but lower than average toward Atheists (25%).



Attitudes to immigration

Immigration levels

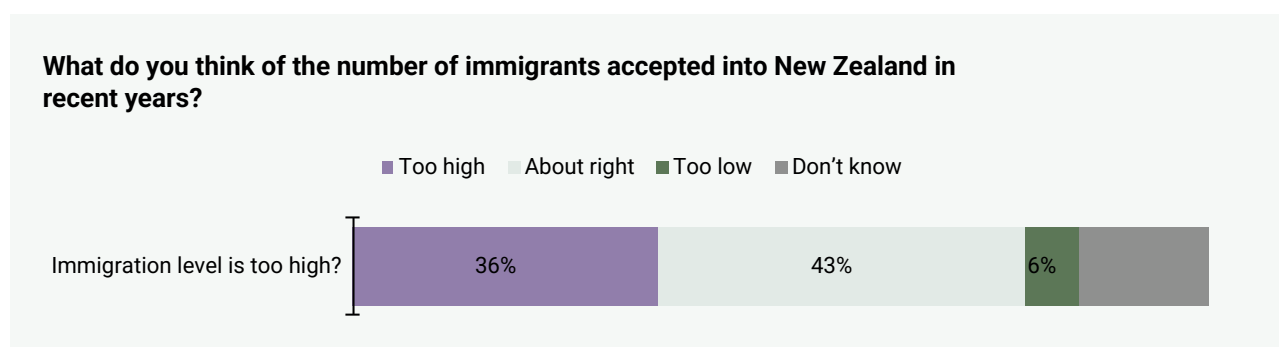
Among New Zealanders, 36% think the number of immigrants accepted in recent years is too high, 43% say about right, 6% say too low, and 15% don't know. Those who are struggling financially (49%) are far more likely to say immigration is too high than those living comfortably (32%) or the prosperous (26%).

NZ First voters (63%) and ACT voters (48%) are the most likely to say too high, while Green voters (21%) are the least.

Wellington stands out as the most relaxed region (23% too high) compared to the rest of the North Island (41%).

Asian respondents (26%) are the least likely to say too high, while NZ European respondents (37%) and Pasifika respondents (37%) are more concerned.

Age shows a mild gradient: 39% of those aged 60+ say too high, compared to 33% of those aged 30-44.



Attitudes toward immigration

Across 10 agree/disagree statements, New Zealanders are broadly positive about immigration but with clear limits. The most widely held view is that multiculturalism is good for New Zealand (67% agree). Immigrants are seen as good for the economy (54%), and migrant diversity is seen as making New Zealand stronger (53%). Agreement that immigrants make good citizens sits at 47%, and that immigrants improve society at 47%.

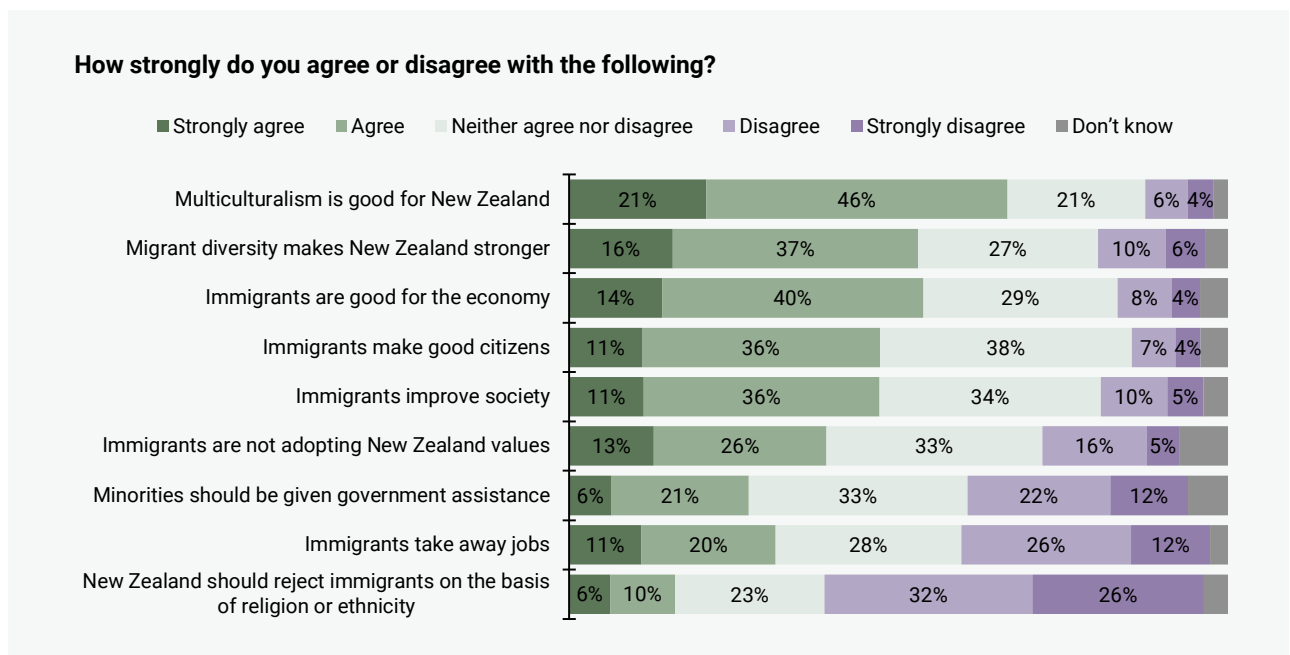
On the more sceptical side, 39% agree immigrants are not adopting New Zealand values, while 31% agree immigrants take away jobs and 27% agree minorities should be given government assistance. Of the respondents, 16% say New Zealand should reject immigrants who are too different, and 15% agree we should reject immigrants on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Ethnicity shapes these attitudes. Asian respondents are the most pro-immigration across nearly all measures: 74% say multiculturalism is good (vs 66% NZ European), 70% say immigrants are good for the economy (vs 52%), and 63% say immigrants improve society (vs 45%). Pasifika respondents are positive on multiculturalism (71%) but are less convinced immigrants are good for the economy (49%). NZ European respondents are the most likely to say immigrants are not adopting NZ values (40%) and that immigrants take away jobs (34%).

Financial position tracks consistently. Those who are struggling are less positive on every measure: 61% say multiculturalism is good (vs 69% comfortable), 42% say immigrants are good for the economy (vs 59%), and 44% say immigrants take away jobs (vs 25% comfortable). The gap between 'getting along' and 'struggling' is where attitudes shift most sharply on the jobs question: 33% versus 44%.

Party vote reveals the deepest divides. Green voters (89%) are the most enthusiastic about multiculturalism, followed by Labour (73%), while NZ First voters (47%) are the least. On whether immigrants are good for the economy, Green voters (71%) more than double NZ First voters (37%). NZ First voters lead on scepticism: 59% say immigrants are not adopting NZ values, and 58% say immigrants take away jobs. ACT voters (53%) also show high scepticism about value adoption. Green voters (50%) and Te Pāti Māori voters (48%) are the most supportive of government assistance for minorities, while ACT voters (8%) and NZ First voters (13%) are the least.

Those born overseas (70%) are more positive about multiculturalism than those born in New Zealand (65%). Wellington respondents are consistently the most pro-immigration across measures, while the rest of the North Island is the most sceptical.

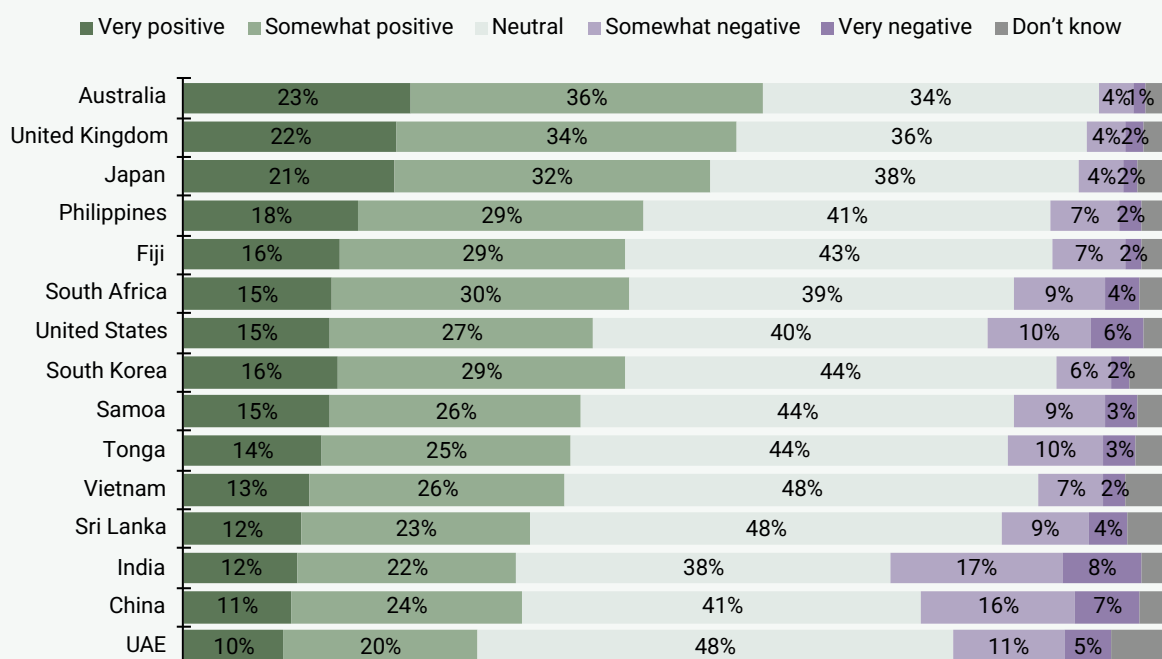


Feelings toward immigrants by country of origin

Feelings toward immigrants follow a clear hierarchy. Australians (59% positive) and British immigrants (56%) attract the warmest feelings, followed by Japanese (53%), Filipino (47%), and South African (45%) immigrants. South Korean (45%), Fijian (45%), and American (42%) immigrants sit in the middle. Samoan (40%), Tongan (39%), Vietnamese (39%), and Sri Lankan (35%) immigrants receive slightly lower positivity. Indian (34%), Chinese (34%), and UAE (31%) immigrants receive the lowest positive feelings, with Muslim immigrants at 28%.

Age matters. Those aged 60+ are consistently more positive toward immigrants from Western countries (70% positive toward Australians, 68% towards British) but this advantage narrows for non-Western countries. NZ European respondents are warmest toward Australian (63%) and British (60%) immigrants but sit around 39–47% for most other nationalities. Pasifika respondents show distinctive warmth toward Samoan (50%) and Tongan (47%) immigrants, well above the national average. Green voters show the most even spread of positive feelings across nationalities, while NZ First voters show the steepest drop-off from Western to non-Western countries (64% for Australia, 25% for Tonga, 24% for Sri Lanka).

Would you say your feelings are positive or negative towards immigrants from...?

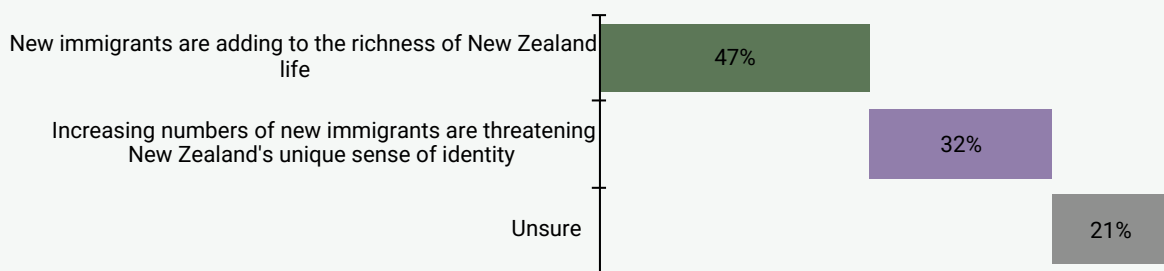


Immigrants adding richness vs threatening identity

When asked directly whether immigrants add to cultural richness or threaten national identity, 47% say immigrants add to richness, 32% say increasing numbers threaten identity, and 21% are unsure.

Asian respondents (60%) are the most likely to see immigrants as adding richness, while NZ European respondents (47%) sit at the national average. Pasifika respondents (44%) are somewhat below average. Age shows little variation on this question. Financial position matters: prosperous respondents (58%) are more likely to see richness than those struggling (37%). Green voters (72%) overwhelmingly see richness, while NZ First voters (26%) are the most likely to see a threat to identity (58%).

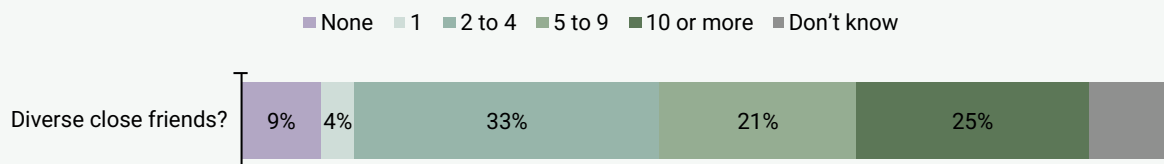
Which of the following is closest to your views?



Diverse close friendships

Most New Zealanders (91%) report having at least one close friend from a different national, ethnic, or religious background, 25% have 10 or more, 21% have 5-9, 33% have 2-4, and 4% have one. Only 9% report having none. Those with more diverse connections show greater acceptance of diversity.

How many close friends from different national, ethnic, or religious backgrounds do you have?



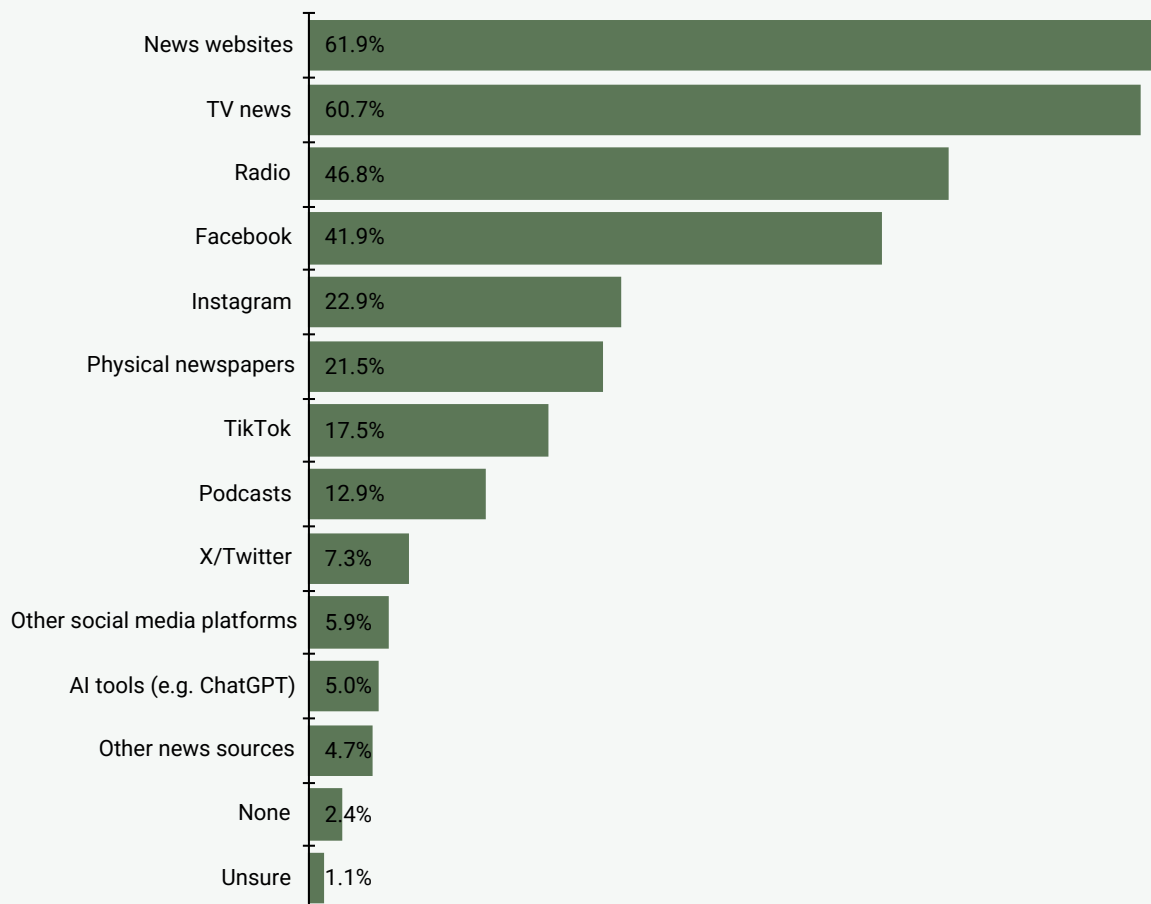
Media and social media

News sources

News websites (62%) and TV news (61%) are the most common news sources for New Zealanders, followed by radio (47%). Facebook (42%) is the fourth most used news source overall, ahead of Instagram (23%), physical newspapers (22%), and TikTok (18%). Podcasts (12%), X/Twitter (7%), AI tools such as ChatGPT (5%), and other social media (5%) remain niche sources. Only 2% report getting news from no source, and 1% are unsure.

The user profiles of each platform differ. Physical newspaper readers skew older and more financially secure, with 56% financial satisfaction and 89% voting in general elections. TikTok users skew young, with higher rates of financial stress (50% dissatisfied with finances), renters, and Māori and Pasifika respondents. Facebook has the broadest user base, drawing heavily from women, those aged 30-59, and those outside major centres. Media consumption is varied.

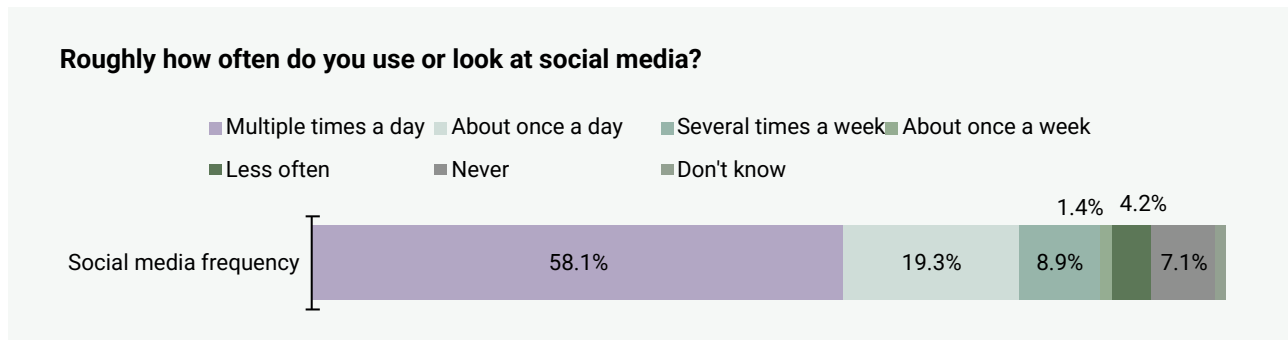
Where do you get news from?



Social media usage frequency

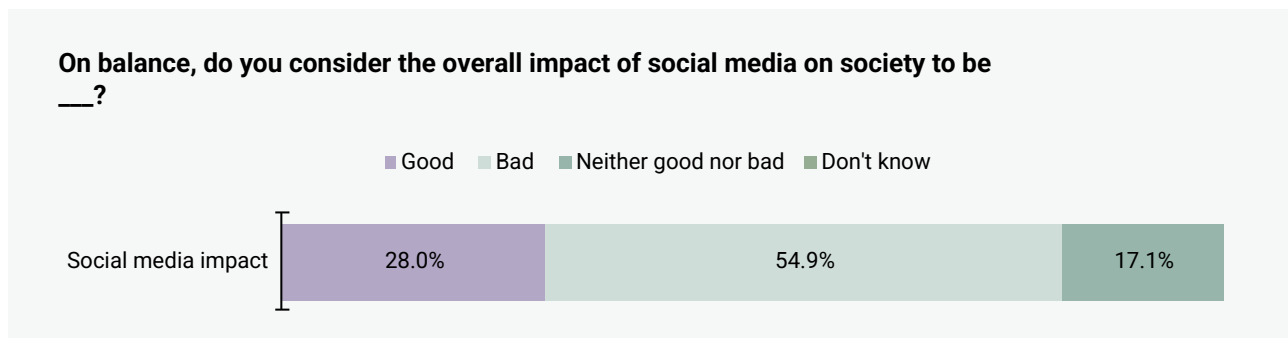
More than half of New Zealanders (56%) use social media multiple times a day. A further 14% check in about once a day, and around 8% use it several times a week. About 4% use social media once a week, 7% less often than that, and 7% never use it. Around 2% don't know.

The heaviest users (multiple times a day) are disproportionately younger, female, and in lower income brackets. Those who never use social media skew older and are more likely to own their home outright. This demographic sorting means that many of the outcome differences by frequency reported below are confounded with age and financial position.



Perceived impact of social media on society

New Zealanders are sceptical about what social media does to society. Around 54% say the overall impact of social media on society is bad, compared to 28% who say it is good. About 17% say it is neither good nor bad. This is a majority verdict across age groups and political affiliations. Most New Zealanders use social media multiple times a day (56%) and most also believe it is bad for society (54%). The overlap between these two groups is substantial: we are heavy users of tools we believe are doing harm.



Methodology

All figures in this report are drawn from the Social Cohesion Survey, an annual nationally representative survey of New Zealand adults commissioned by The Helen Clark Foundation and conducted by Talbot Mills Research. The 2025 wave surveyed 2,882 respondents in November–December 2025, with booster samples for Māori, Pacific, and Asian communities. The 2024 wave surveyed 2,631 respondents. All estimates are population-weighted.

The Social Cohesion Index and Aspiration Index are composite measures constructed from multiple survey items, each rescaled to 0–100 and averaged. Cluster analysis uses K-means clustering on five standardised domain scores. Regressions are weighted least squares with HC1 robust standard errors.

A note on causation. The cross-sectional design of both survey waves means we cannot definitively establish causal direction. Financial stress is associated with lower belonging, which is associated with lower participation. Mediation analysis supports this causal ordering, and the theoretical literature provides strong priors for it. But reverse causation, where low participation leads to social disconnection, which in turn worsens financial hardship, cannot be ruled out with cross-sectional data. The year-on-year change analysis mitigates this concern to some extent, as we can observe which variables moved first. This is a limitation of cross-sectional data.

Australian comparison data is drawn from the Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion 2025 report. Our survey adapts the Scanlon methodology to the New Zealand context. Time series comparisons draw on data from the General Social Survey, World Values Survey, NZAVS, and Migrant Communities Perceptions Monitor.



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